

THE OPPORTUNITIES
OF A NIGHT

BY M. de CREBILLON le FILS

TRANSLATED BY
ERIC SUTTON

INTRODUCTION BY ALDOUS HUXLEY

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THE OPPORTUNITIES
OF A NIGHT

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Translated by

ERIC SUTTON

from

LA NUIT ET LE MOMENT

by

M. de CRÉBILLON le FILS

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With an Introduction by

ALDOUS HUXLEY

Haec legite, Austeri, crimen amoris abest.—Ovid

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

'La Nuit et le Moment, ou les Matines de Cythère,' by Crébillon fils, was first published in Paris in 1755, and has been frequently reprinted since.

INTRODUCTION

PROPHECY is mainly interesting for the light it throws on the age in which it is uttered. The *Apocalypse*, for example, tells us how a Christian felt about the world at the end of the first century. Manifestly ludicrous as a forecast, Mercier's *L'An 2240* is worth reading, because it shows us what were the ideals of an earnest and rather stupid Frenchman in the year 1770. And the ideals of an earnest and very intelligent Englishman of the early twentieth century may be studied, in all their process of development, in the long series of Mr. Wells's prophetic books. Our notions of the future have something of that significance which Freud attributes to our dreams. And not our notions of the future only: our notions of the past as well. For if prophecy is an expression of our contemporary fears and wishes, so too, to a very great extent, is history—or at least what passes for history among the mass of ordinary unprofessional folk. Utopias, earthly paradises and earthly hells are flowers of the imagination which contrive to blossom and luxuriate even in the midst of the stoniest dates and documents, even within the fixed and narrow boundaries of established fact. The works of St. Thomas survive; we have a record of the acts of Innocent III. But

that does not prevent our pictures of the Middle Ages from being as various and as highly coloured as our pictures of Utopia, the Servile State or the New Jerusalem. We see the past through the refractive medium of our prejudices, our tastes, our contemporary fears and hopes. The facts of history exist; but they hardly trouble us. We select and interpret our documents till they square with our theories.

The eighteenth century is a period which has been interpreted and re-interpreted in the most surprisingly various ways: by its own philosophers (for the eighteenth century was highly self-conscious) as the age of reason and enlightenment; by the Romantics and their strange heirs, the Reactionaries and the Early Victorians, as the age of vice and spiritual drought; by the later nineteenth-century sceptics, who curiously combined the strictest Protestant morality with the most dogmatically anti-Christian philosophy, as an age of reason indeed, but of more than dubious character; by the Beardsleyites of the 'nineties as an epoch of deliciously depraved frivolity, of futile and therefore truly æsthetic elegance. The popular conception of the eighteenth century at the present day is a mixture of Beardsley's and Voltaire's. We find its morals and its manners in the highest degree 'amusing'; and when we want a stick to beat the corpses of the Eminent Victorians we

apply to Hume or Gibbon, to Voltaire or Helvétius, to Horace Walpole or Madame du Deffand. For the simpler-minded among us, the eighteenth century is summed up by Mr. Nigel Playfair's version of The Beggar's Opera. The more sophisticated find their dix-huitième in the original French documents (judiciously selected) or in the ironic pages of Mr. Lytton Strachey.

Charming historical Utopia! A moment's thought, however, is sufficient to show how arbitrarily we have abstracted it from reality. For who, after all, were the most important, the most durable and influential men that the century produced? The names of Bach, Handel, and Mozart present themselves immediately to the mind; of Swedenborg and Wesley and Blake; of Dr. Johnson, Bishop Berkeley and Kant. Of none of these can it be said that he fits very easily into the scheme of The Beggar's Opera. True, our pianists and conductors have tried, Procrustes-like, to squeeze the musicians into the dix-huitième mould. They play Bach mechanically, Handel lightly, Mozart frivolously, without feeling and therefore without sense, and call the process a 'classical' interpretation. But let that pass. The fact remains that the greatest men of the eighteenth century are not in the least what we should call dix-huitième.

It must not be imagined, however, that our particular

'eighteenth century' is completely mythical. Something like it did genuinely exist, during a couple of generations, among a small class of people in most European countries, especially France. The fact that we have chosen to re-create a whole historical epoch in the image of this intellectually free and morally licentious dix-huitième throws some light on our own problems, our own twentieth-century bugbears, our own desires. For a certain section of contemporary society the terms 'modern' and 'eighteenth century' are almost synonymous. Like our ancestors, we too are in revolt against intellectual authority and moral 'prejudices'. Perhaps the chief difference between them and us is that they believed in pure reason as well as extra-conjugal love; we Bergsonians do not.

One of the most characteristic representatives of this particular dix-huitième which we have chosen to exalt at the expense of all the other possible eighteenth centuries, is Crébillon the Younger. We find in his novels all the qualities which we regard as typical of the period: elegance, frivolity, a complete absence of moral 'prejudices', especially on the subject of love, a certain dry spirit of detachment and analysis. Le Sopha and La Nuit et le Moment are documents which, taken by themselves, completely justify our current conception of the age in which they were

written. For that reason alone they deserve to be read. One should always be prepared to quote authorities in support of one's theories. Moreover, they are worth reading for their own sakes. For Crébillon was a psychologist and, in his own limited field, one of the most acute of his age.

The typically modern method of presenting character differs from that employed by the novelists of the eighteenth century. In our novels we offer the facts in a so to speak raw state, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions from them. The older psychologists treated the facts to a preliminary process of intellectual digestion; they gave their readers something more than the mere behaviouristic material on which psychological judgments are based; they gave them the conclusions they themselves had already drawn from the facts. Compare Constant's *Adolphe* with the *Ulysses* of James Joyce; the difference of method is manifest. Crébillon is a characteristic eighteenth-century psychologist. With the dry intellectual precision of his age, he describes and comments on his characters, analyses their behaviour, draws conclusions, formulates generalizations. What a contemporary novelist would imply in twenty pages of description and talk, he expresses outright in two or three sentences that are an intellectual summing up of all the evidence. The novelist who employs the older method

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gains in definition and clarity what he loses in realism, in life, in expansive implication and suggestion. There is much to be said for both methods of presentation; most of all, perhaps, for a Proustian combination of the two.

So much for Cr billon's method of presenting character. It is time to consider the sort of people and the particular aspect of their characters which he liked to present. His heroes and heroines are the men and women of our own favourite dix-huiti me—the eighteenth century whose representative man is rather Casanova than Bach, rather the Cardinal de Bernis than Wesley. They are aristocrats who fill their indefinite leisure with an amateur's interest in literature, art, and even science (see, for the scientific interests, Clitandre's story, in this volume, of his physico-physiological argument with Julie); with talk and social intercourse, with gambling and country sports; and above all, with that most perfect of time-killers, amour. Cr billon's main, his almost exclusive preoccupation is with the last of these aristocratic amusements. And it is on his psychology of love—of a certain kind of love—that his claim to literary immortality must be based.

Cr billon's special province is that obscure borderland between soul and body, where physiology and psychology meet and mingle and are reciprocally complicated. It is a

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province of which, during the last century and in this country, at any rate, we have heard but the scantiest accounts. It was only with birth that physiology ever made its entrance into the Victorian novel, not with conception. In these matters, Crébillon's age was more scientific. The existence of physiology was frankly admitted at every stage of the reproductive process. It was mentioned in connection with every kind of love, from l'amour passion to l'amour goût. It was freely discussed, and its phenomena described, classified, and explained. The relations between the senses and the imagination, between love and pleasure, between desire and the affections are methodically defined in that literature of which Crébillon's stories are representative. And it is very right that they should be so defined. For no analysis of love can claim to be complete which ignores the physiological basis and accompaniment of the passion. 'Love', says Donne in his nearest approach to a versified epigram,

'Love's not so pure and abstract as they use
To say, who have no mistress but their Muse.'

The distinction between sacred and profane, spiritual and fleshly love is an arbitrary, gratuitous, and metaphysical distinction. The most spiritual love is rooted in the flesh; the most sacred is only profane love sublimated and refined.

To ignore these obvious facts is foolish and slightly dishonest. And indeed, they never have been ignored except by the psychologists of the nineteenth century. The writers of every other age have always admitted them. It was in aristocratic France, however, and during the eighteenth century, that they were most closely and accurately studied. Crébillon Fils is one of the acuteſt, one of the moſt ſcientific of the ſtudents.

Scientific—I apply the epithet deliberately, not vaguely and at random. For Crébillon’s attitude towards the phenomena of ſex ſeems to me preciſely that of the true ſcientific investigator. It is with a mind entirely open and unbiassed that he approaches the ſubject. He contrives to forget that love is a matter of the moſt intimate human concern, that it has been from time immemorial the ſubject of philoſophical ſpeculation and moral precept. Making a clean ſweep of all the prejudices, he ſets to work, coolly and with detachment, as though the ſubject of his investigations were ſomething as remote, as utterly divorced from good and evil as ſpiral nebulæ, liver flukes or the aurora borealis.

Men have always tended to attribute to the objects of their intense emotions, and even to the emotions themſelves, ſome kind of cosmical ſignificance. Myſtics and lovers, for

example, have never been content to find the justification for their feelings in the feelings themselves: they have asked us to believe that these feelings possess a universal truth value as well as, for themselves, a personal behaviour value. And they have invented cosmogonies and metaphysical systems to justify and explain their emotional attitudes. The fact that all these metaphysical systems are, scientifically speaking, almost certainly untrue in no way affects the value for the individual and for whole societies of the emotions and attitudes which gave them birth. Thus, mysticism will always be a beautiful and precious thing, even though it should be conclusively proved that all the philosophical systems based upon it are nonsensical. And one can be convinced of the superiority of spiritual to carnal, of 'conjugal' to 'scortatory' love without believing a word of Plato or Swedenborg.

In a quiet and entirely unpretentious way Crébillon was an expounder of the scientific truth about love—that its basis is physiological; that the intense and beautiful emotions which it arouses cannot be philosophically justified or explained, but should be gratefully accepted for what they are: feelings significant in themselves and of the highest practical importance for those who experience them. He is no vulgar and stupid cynic who denies the existence, because

he cannot accept the current metaphysical explanation, of any feelings higher than the merely physical. 'Les plaisirs gagnent toujours à être ennoblis,' says Crébillon, through the mouth of the Duke in Le Hasard au Coin du Feu. It is the man of science who speaks, the unprejudiced observer, the accepter of facts. Pleasure is a fact; so is nobility. He admits the existence of both. Pleasure gains by being ennobled: that is the practical, experimental justification of all the high, aspiring, seemingly infinite emotions evoked by love. True, it may be objected that Crébillon gives too little space in his analysis of love to that which ennobles pleasure and too much to pleasure pure and simple. He would have been more truly scientific if he had reversed the balance; for that which ennobles is of more practical significance, both to individuals and to societies, than that which is ennobled. We may excuse him, perhaps, by supposing that, in the society in which he lived (the Pompadour was his patroness) his opportunities for observing the ennobling passions were scarce in comparison with his opportunities for observing the raw physiological material on which such passions work.

But it is foolish as well as ungrateful to criticize an author for what he has failed to achieve. The reader's business is with what the writer has done, not with what

he has left undone. And Crébillon, after all, did do something which, whatever its limitations, was worth doing. What writer, for example, has spoken more acutely on the somewhat scabrous, but none the less important subject of feminine 'temperament'? I cannot do better than quote a specimen of his analysis, with the generalization he draws from it. He is speaking here of a woman whose imagination is more ardent than her senses, and who, living in a society where this imagination is perpetually being fired, is for ever desperately trying to experience the pleasures of which she dreams. 'Elle a l'imagination fort vive et fort déréglée, et quoique l'inutilité des épreuves qu'elle a faites en certain genre eût dû la corriger d'en faire, elle ne veut pas se persuader qu'elle soit née plus malheureuse qu'elle croit que d'autres ne le sont, et elle se flatte toujours qu'il est réservé au dernier qu'elle prend de la rendre aussi sensible qu'elle désire de l'être. Je ne doute même pas que cette idée ne soit la source de ses dérèglements et de la peine qu'elle prend de jouer ce qu'elle ne sent pas. . . . Je dirai plus, c'est qu'aujourd'hui il est prouvé que ce sont les femmes à qui les plaisirs de l'amour sont les moins nécessaires qui les recherchent avec le plus de fureur, et que les trois quarts de celles qui se sont perdues avaient reçu de la nature tout ce qu'il leur fallait pour ne l'être pas.' Admirable description

of a type not at all uncommon in all societies where love-making is regarded as the proper study of womankind! The type, I repeat, is not uncommon; but Crébillon's succinct and accurate description of it is something almost unique.

Here is another passage in which he analyses the motives of a different type of cold woman—a much more dangerous type, it may be remarked: the type to which all successful adventuresses belong. '*Soit caprice, soit vanité, la chose du monde qui lui plaît le plus est d'inspirer de désirs; elle jouit du moins des transports de son amant. D'ailleurs, la froideur de ses sens n'empêche pas sa tête de s'animer, et si la nature lui a refusé ce que l'on appelle le plaisir, elle lui a en échange donné une sorte de volupté qui n'existe, à la vérité, que dans ses idées; mais qui lui fait peut-être éprouver quelque chose de plus délicat que ce qui ne part que des sens. Pour vous,*' adds Clitandre, addressing his companion, '*pour vous, plus heureuse qu'elle, vous avez, si je ne me trompe, rassemblé les deux.*'

It would be possible to compile out of the works of Crébillon a whole collection of such character-sketches and aphorisms. '*What every Young Don Juan ought to Know*' might serve as title to this florilegium. It should be placed in the hands of all those, women as well as men, who propose

to lead, professionally, the arduous and difficult life of leisure. Here are a few of the aphorisms which will deserve to find a place in this anthology of psychological wisdom.

‘Une jolie femme dépend bien moins d’elle-même que des circonstances; et par malheur il s’en trouve tant, de si peu prévues, de si pressantes, qu’il n’y a point à s’étonner si, après plusieurs aventures, elle n’a connu ni l’amour, ni son cœur. Il s’ensuit que ce qu’on croit la dernière fantaisie d’une femme est bien souvent sa première passion.’

‘Les sens ont aussi leur délicatesse; à un certain point on les émeut; qu’on le passe, on les révolte.’

‘L’on n’occupe pas longtemps l’imagination d’une femme sans aller jusqu’à son cœur, ou du moins sans que par les effets cela ne revienne au même.’

*Of Crébillon’s life there is but little to say. It was quite uneventful. The record of it, singularly scanty, contains almost no unusual or surprising element. It was precisely the life which you would expect the author of *Le Sopha* to have led: a cheerful, social, literary life in the Paris of Louis XV. Crébillon was born on St. Valentine’s day, 1707, thus achieving legitimacy by fifteen days; for his parents were only married on the thirty-first of January. His father was Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon, the tragic poet who provoked the envy and the competitive rivalry of*

Voltaire. I am not ashamed to say that I have never read a line of the elder Crébillon's works. Life is not so long that one can afford to spend even the briefest time in the perusal of eighteenth-century French tragedians. I am not even quite convinced that it is long enough to justify one in reading those of the seventeenth century. But let that pass. The time I have given to Racine and Corneille has been given, in any case, irrevocably. To Crébillon the Elder I have so far given nothing; and I hope to live out my days without ever allowing him a minute, a second even, of my exiguous treasure. So much for the genius of Crébillon Père.

The literary career of the younger Crébillon began in the theatre. In association with the actors, Romagnesi, Biancolelli, and Riccoboni he composed a number of satirical pieces and parodies for the Italian comedians. It was at this period that he confided to Sébastien Mercier, 'qu'il n'avait encore achevé la lecture des tragédies de son père, mais que cela viendrait. Il regardait la tragédie française comme la farce la plus complète qu'ait pu inventer l'esprit humain.'

*His first successful novel, *Tanzai et Néardarné, Histoire Japonaise*, was published in 1734. It was so successful, indeed, and so Japanese, that Crébillon, accused of satirising the Cardinal de Rohan and other important*

persons, was arrested and thrown into prison, from which, however, the good graces of a royal reader soon released him.

Tanzai was followed in 1736 by *Les Egarements du Cœur et de l'Esprit*, and in 1740 by *Le Sopha*. It was the epoch of Crébillon's social triumphs. He was for some time perpetual chairman of the famous dinners of the Caveau, and there were many other societies of which he was, officially or unofficially, the leading light.

In 1748 he married—somewhat tardily, for he had had a child by her two years before—an English wife, Lady Mary Howard. It is said that the poor lady squinted, was very ugly, awkward in society, shy and deeply religious. Crébillon seems, none the less, to have been a model husband, while the marriage lasted; which was not very long, however, for Lady Mary died about 1756. Their only child died in infancy a short time after being legitimated.

It was in 1759 that the favour of Madame de Pompadour procured for Crébillon the post of Royal Censor of Literature. He performed his duties conscientiously and to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. On the death of his father, in 1762, he received a pension. In 1774 he became Police Censor as well as Royal Censor. In 1777 he died. For all practical purposes, however, he had been

dead fifteen years or more. 'Il y a longtemps,' said his obituarist, 'très longtemps même, qu'il avait eu le chagrin de se voir survivre à lui-même.' Melancholy fate! It caused his contemporaries to do him, towards the end, something less than justice. The most enthusiastic of his epitaphs is cool enough:

Dans ce tombeau gît Crébillon.
 Qui? le fameux tragique?—Non!
 Celui qui le mieux peignit l'âme
 Du petit-maître et de la femme.

The praise is faint. It is meant, perhaps, to damn. But it does not succeed in damning. To have been the best painter of anybody's soul, even the fop's, even the eighteenth-century lady's, is a fine achievement. 'Je fus étonnée,' says one of Crébillon's characters, describing the charms of her lover's conversation, 'je fus étonnée de la sorte de consistance que les objets les plus frivoles semblaient prendre entre ses mains.' The whole merit of that French eighteenth century, of which Crébillon was the representative man, consisted precisely in giving 'a sort of consistency to the most frivolous objects.' To lead a life of leisure gracefully is an art, and though we can all do nothing, few of us contrive to do it well. It is scarcely possible to imagine a life more hopelessly futile than that which was led by the

men and women of the old French aristocracy. Intrinsically, such a life seems ghastly in its emptiness and sterility. And yet, somehow, by sheer force of style, these frivolous creatures of the dix-huitième contrived to fill the emptiness, to coax the most charming and elegant flowers from the sterility of their existence. To the most futile of lives they gave 'a sort of consistency'; they endowed nothingness with solidity and form. Crébillon shared this power with his contemporaries. The conquests of the petit-maître, the prompt surrenders of Célie and Cidalise and Julie—these are his theme. It seems unpromising in its smallness and its triviality. But by dint of treating it seriously—with the double seriousness of the scientific observer and the literary artist—he has made out of it something which we in our turn are compelled to take seriously. Like Célie, we are astonished.

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A DIALOGUE

CIDALISE : CLITANDRE

CIDALISE

[*As CLITANDRE enters wearing a dressing-gown.*] Good heavens, Clitandre, can it be you?

CLITANDRE

Your surprise, Madame, astonishes me a little: I thought you familiar with my attentions, and I cannot understand what you find so singular in my visit.

CIDALISE

It is because I conceived I had some reason for thinking that if you were disposed to pass the evening with some one, it would not be with me, and your presence surprised me accordingly.

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CLITANDRE

Let us be frank: was this your only feeling? Has not my visit embarrassed you more than it has surprised you? Surely, this would be at least possible.

CIDALISE

This is a new idea of yours: might I ask what gave rise to it?

CLITANDRE

I have no intention of making any mystery of the matter; but would you be kind enough to tell me, in return, why you were so surprised to see me this evening, when at other times my visits have seemed the most natural thing in the world?

CIDALISE

I thought that then you were giving me your spare moments; but I fancy you are now hardly so much at leisure as I have seen you in the past.

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CLITANDRE

Indeed, I had the same idea about you: and that is precisely why I am in some measure concerned lest you may find my visit a little inopportune.

CIDALISE

Inopportune, indeed! I admire your choice of words, and, if I may say so, the extravagance of your ideas. Would you perhaps be so good as to tell me why you thought that your visit would be so inconvenient to me to-day?

CLITANDRE

I will, provided that you will be kind enough to inform me why my presence here causes you so much astonishment.

CIDALISE

I will soon satisfy your curiosity. [*She goes into her dressing-room, reappears, and changes her shift: her maid takes off her shoes and stockings.*]

CLITANDRE

Oh, what exquisite legs!

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CIDALISE

Spare me, Sir; your compliments cannot excuse your assurance.

CLITANDRE

I do not know if it is the first time that I have praised them; but I am quite sure that it is not the first time I have admired them.

CIDALISE

You must go and sit down over there, or leave the room.

CLITANDRE

Your treatment of me, Madame, is somewhat singular; but I obey. [*She gets into bed and tells one of her women to remain.* CLITANDRE *sits in an armchair by the bed.*]

CIDALISE

Is it the fact, Clitandre, that you have no rendezvous with anyone?

CLITANDRE

Can it be true that I am not preventing your seeing Eraste?

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CIDALISE

Eraste! really you cannot think so, my poor Count.

CLITANDRE

Then I swear to you, my lovely Marquise, that I think just as little of the women who are sleeping in your house, as you of him.

CIDALISE

What? Not even of Araminte?

CLITANDRE

Araminte! Indeed, an excellent jest! Is it because you were malicious enough to invite her here that you thought I ought to be amusing her?

CIDALISE

Admirably answered! I suppose you wish me to believe that you do not know why she is here?

CLITANDRE

Oh, pardon me: I can guess at her aspirations; you can gather that from the annoyance I feel at her

presence in your house. I cannot understand you: one must indeed be apprehensive of lack of company before undertaking a woman of her kind.

CIDALISE

Really, Clitandre, this is quite superfluous discretion, or a foolish pleasantry. You will doubtless discover that it was I who played you the sorry trick of inviting Célimène, and that it is also my fault that Belise, Luscinde, and Julie are in my house at the same time.

CLITANDRE

Oh, as for those ladies, in view of the presence of Cléon, Oronte and Valère, you could hardly have thought that they were here for me.

CIDALISE

Still, I would not take an oath that the honour that they do me is unconnected with your presence.

CLITANDRE

How absurd! I have been here more than a week: the men came the day before yesterday and the

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women came to-day. So that you can no more accuse the ladies of having come for my sake than you can flatter yourself that the men are here for yours.

CIDALISE

You can hardly think me so foolish.

CLITANDRE

You would be quite wrong to complain of Valère, Eraсте, and Cléon. They arrived two days before the women that they expected to find here. They are persons of consideration: and I would wager that they don't do as much as this for everybody.

CIDALISE

I am very sensible of the courtesy of their behaviour: but, Clitandre, are you sure that you are not the object of the attentions of these ladies?

CLITANDRE

You know what they are doing.

CIDALISE

But do I know what they would like to do?

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CLITANDRE

Ah, Madame, let me tell you that such notions are quite inappropriate in the case of women whose intentions are so extremely definite.

CIDALISE

Really, Clitandre, you are becoming quite ridiculous: I will not press you further, because I have reason to think that it would be disagreeable to you; but I will never forgive Eraсте for having come and spoiled what would have been so delightful a supper-party.

CLITANDRE

I can well understand that his presence was unwelcome; but I must admit that I do not conceive how the party could have been so much more agreeable to you had he not been there.

CIDALISE

What! Don't you understand how disagreeable I found your embarrassment in the company of four women with whom you had had sentimental relations and who doubtless preserved some claim upon you?

CLITANDRE

It would indeed be foolish of me to pretend that I had not had relations with some of them. But it would be something more than indiscreet for me to say that all of them had so favoured me. But, in any case, even supposing they had all honoured me with their kindness, of what consequence to-day could that be to them or to me? How can you expect, in the daily commerce of life, that people whom chance, caprice or circumstances have brought together for a few moments should remember what has interested them so little? So true is this, that some while ago, being at supper at the house of a certain lady, I had not the slightest recollection of her and, indeed, I would have taken my leave as if she had been quite unknown to me if she had not reminded me that we had been tenderly in love with each other in days gone by.

CIDALISE

I am surprised that it was she who recognized you. It is generally supposed that we forget such adventures much more quickly than men.

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CLITANDRE

I know that this is the common accusation, but I have always felt that the failure of memory in this respect was about equal in both sexes.

CIDALISE

Still, it is more remarkable in a woman than in a man.

CLITANDRE

Setting all prejudice aside, I fancy that it depends a good deal on the sacrifices, greater or less, that you are called upon to make. If, by the most singular chance, it happened that a woman had to make no greater sacrifices than a man, then I see no reason why she should be expected to remember certain events any more exactly than we do. Still, notwithstanding what is perhaps the common opinion, it is not usual for two people, who have lived together not without kindness, however brief may have been their connection, and however little feeling they put into it, to retain so slight a recollection of it; yet at the same time I do not think it impossible that the recollection of such passages may entirely pass out of the mind.

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CIDALISE

Well, I prefer to think it impossible. You remember Célimène, do you not?

CLITANDRE

That is quite different. Our affair lasted a long time and I loved her too tenderly to have forgotten her to that extent.

CIDALISE

If you are speaking the truth, she is indeed fortunate.

CLITANDRE

Hardly, since I only remember her to despise her beyond all expression.

CIDALISE

Oh, cruel one! And yet I have something that she wishes me to say to you.

CLITANDRE

She! To me! Though, after all, I should never be surprised at what she did.

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CIDALISE

She maintains that you have treated her with the most outrageous injustice, and that you persist in condemning her unheard.

CLITANDRE

You know the story as well as I do, Madame, and since you have no fault to find with me, you will permit me to be quite indifferent to her accusation. I should, however, have been amazed at her audacity in asking you to speak for her, realizing as she must how well you know her, had not Eraſte, who has behaved so abominably to you, even in my presence, asked me to speak to you on his behalf.

CIDALISE

Do you really mean this, Clitandre?

CLITANDRE

He certainly did so, Madame, and his demeanour displayed a warmth of feeling that would undoubtedly have pleased you had you witnessed it.

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CIDALISE

Oh, no doubt I should have been delighted! I suppose he considers me entirely responsible for our separation?

CLITANDRE

Partly, of course: yet he showed a certain moderation as regards his own part in the matter, and apart from your bad temper which, he says, you disguise under the name of delicacy so that you may have the less scruple in giving way to it, he says you are a kind sort of creature, and not entirely devoid of principle.

CIDALISE

Insolent wretch! I can certainly not say the same of him. But were you not amazed at the calm way in which he has established himself here?

CLITANDRE

I must confess that his appearance did a little surprise me: though indeed I did not think that he had come here without making sure that his presence would not be disagreeable: that is the least consideration that is due to a woman like yourself.

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CIDALISE

Surely you cannot believe that he is here with my consent? About a week before my departure I was having supper with the little Countess, and he was there. We happened to be speaking of the time I expected to be away, and he had the effrontery to tell me that he would come and pay me his attentions. As I knew that he has designs on that poor little woman, and that up to the present she has not entered into them, I imagined that he wanted to make her jealous in order to induce her to make up her mind, and that he did me the honour to suppose that I could arouse her apprehensions. But I received his courtesy so coldly that I assure you I had no notion that he would present himself where he would be more unwelcome than anyone, and believe me, nothing could equal my surprise when I saw him arrive. And I have treated him as you have treated Araminte, whom you appear to dislike even more than Célimène herself.

CLITANDRE

Well, well; if, as I suspect, you invited this lady in order to enjoy the spectacle of some pleasant en-

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counters, one must admit that you have succeeded extremely well and that the supper party was wonderfully gay.

CIDALISE

I think I was never present at a more embarrassing and melancholy affair. You, sitting between two women who annoyed you with their claims on your regard (for you will not deny that at least two of them had such claims), and I, opposite Eraste, irritated beyond all expression by his attentions, his looks, and his conversation. No, really I thought I should have died of annoyance and impatience.

CLITANDRE

These are plagues which destroy us daily, and I can assure you that I was no more at my ease than you.

CIDALISE

Your coldness to Célimène hardly surprised me; but Araminte, whom you have . . .

CLITANDRE

Araminte! What an abominable calumny!

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CIDALISE

Now, you are not to lose your temper with me. Is it my fault, if this is what people are saying?

CLITANDRE

People, indeed! They had better, with her permission, keep her instead of handing her over to me. How agreeable people are!

CIDALISE

Clitandre! You are not being sincere.

CLITANDRE

[*In a low voice.*] If you continue to address me in this tone I shall find it difficult to understand you.

CIDALISE

My fantastic friend! And why this air of mystery?

CLITANDRE

[*Still in a low voice.*] And Justine?

CIDALISE

Well, and what of her?

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CLITANDRE

Oh, nothing; except that I have not decided to take her into my confidence, and as long as she stays in the room I cannot express myself freely on certain matters.

CIDALISE

I do not see why you wish to turn her out to-day: these last few days you have not found her in the way.

CLITANDRE

That may be. But even if it were so, I had not to say to you what I now have in mind. You will do as you like, but I think it would be more convenient if you would consent to our being alone.

CIDALISE

This is surely a singular suggestion. Justine is a most trustworthy young creature.

CLITANDRE

I have nothing against her discretion, and I have no doubt that your secrets are safe in her hands; but you will surely not find it strange if I prefer to confide mine to yours alone.

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CIDALISE

She is asleep: she cannot possibly hear you.

CLITANDRE

She may be pretending: in any case, Madame, whether she is asleep or not, her presence disturbs and annoys me. I must either, with your permission, decline to answer your questions, or we must be alone.

CIDALISE

Alone! and why indeed? Quite absurd! No, considering all the circumstances, I will not consent.

CLITANDRE

You must do as you will. But I must confess that I find it difficult to understand your disinclination in so simple a matter, which can be of so little consequence to you, and is of such importance to me.

CIDALISE

[*With a show of irritation.*] Well, I suppose I must do as you wish: but really, your methods are perhaps

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a little direct! Justine, Justine!—there, she was not asleep after all! Justine, you may go to bed.

JUSTINE

At what time would Madame wish me to come in the morning?

CIDALISE

[*Embarrassed.*] What an extraordinary question! At the usual time, I suppose.

JUSTINE

I will wait until Madame rings.

CIDALISE

Well, Sir: you heard what she said. A pretty remark to make. However, you see to what you expose me.

CLITANDRE

But, Madame, have the condescension to put yourself in my place.

CIDALISE

Put yourself in mine, Sir. Do you really suppose

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that she leaves my room without the conviction that her presence was seriously inconvenient to us: that we are in agreement, and that this meeting, which is merely a chance encounter contemplated by neither of us, is a definite rendezvous?

CLITANDRE

Your Justine must have an unpleasant sort of mind.

CIDALISE

[*Rather sharply.*] She has the mind of her class: isn't that enough? What would you yourself think if you discovered to-morrow that one of the men staying here had passed the best part of the night in my room? Would you have the good feeling to suppose that he had spent the time in telling me stories?

CLITANDRE

I should certainly suppose that you had some good and special reason for such a meeting; but Justine, who is in your confidence and knows that there is nothing between us, ought not to think as I should about such an affair. Heaven, indeed, knows that I wish that she could believe that I was the happiest

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man in the world, as happy as she could possibly do me the honour to believe me.

CIDALISE

Her absence has made you very gallant.

CLITANDRE

No, it has simply enabled me to speak my mind. I should have been indifferent to her departure if I had nothing to gain by it.

CIDALISE

[*Speaking in a serious tone and with an air of slight alarm.*] At least, Sir . . .

CLITANDRE

Ah, Madame, you surely know me. What have I to gain by any indiscretion since you would grant me nothing that I might ask you? And since I should offend you if I attempted to obtain any favour?

CIDALISE

Honestly now, Clitandre, you do not love Ara-

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minté? [CLITANDRE *shrugs his shoulders.*] But she has been your mistress.

CLITANDRE

Ah, that is another matter.

CIDALISE

Indeed, it does make a difference in these days, so they say.

CLITANDRE

And not merely in these days, I fancy.

CIDALISE

You surprise me. I had thought that we were indebted to modern philosophy for the idea.

CLITANDRE

I am willing to think that in this, as in many other things, philosophy has reorganized our ideas; but her achievement has been to teach us to understand the motives of our actions, and not to believe that they are governed by chance, rather than to determine the acts themselves. For instance, before we

learnt to use our reason so skilfully, we certainly acted exactly as we do to-day; but we were carried away by the stream, ignorant of cause and effect, and we behaved with all the diffidence that is born of prejudice. We were no more respectable than we are now: but we wished to appear so, and so absurd a pretension inevitably spoiled our enjoyment. Now at last we have arrived at the truth. And what has been the result? Never have the manœuvres of your sex been so seldom in evidence: never has there been so little affectation of virtue. Our fancies are touched: we are lovers forthwith. Does the relation become tedious? Then we part with as little ceremony as we came together. Does the sentiment revive? We resume the affair with no less liveliness than when we first took it up. Once more we part, but we never quarrel. It is indeed true that love does not come into question at all; but what was love but a desire that we amused ourselves by exaggerating, a movement of the senses transformed by the vanity of men into a virtue? To-day we know that it is merely an inclination: and if we still use the word love, that is not because we believe in it, but because it is a rather more courteous method of

asking each other for what we want. As we come together without love, so we separate without hatred, and the faint inclination which we are able to inspire gives us at least the advantage of being always willing to oblige. Is a woman overcome by the unexpected inconstancy of a lover? Why, she is hardly given the time to feel it. Is she not permitted, for reasons of propriety or interest, to abandon a tiresome lover, or one who has ceased to appear agreeable? Indeed, all her friends will feel it their duty to overwhelm her with their advice on her unfortunate situation. Is she seized with a caprice? In a moment it is satisfied. And in all the situations which I have described, a man may equally avail himself of the gratitude of the women with whom he has lived in circumstances of some slight intimacy. All things considered, I think that in the interest of so much enjoyment it was wise to sacrifice a few ancient prejudices which inspire very little respect, and are the cause of much inconvenience to those who still use them as their rules of conduct.

CIDALISE

If you believe everything that you have told me you

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have certainly not acted according to your own maxims, you who loved Célimène so tenderly, and have not yet consoled yourself for her inconstancy.

CLITANDRE

I adored her: I admit it. But perhaps the attitude of mind that I have described to you is not so much my own as that, or so it would appear, of certain persons I see around me to-day.

CIDALISE

Ah, Clitandre! whatever regrets your own heart may have brought you, do not change it. It is possible, believe me, that you may meet some one more worthy of your feelings than Célimène; and it would be beneath you to avenge her disgraceful behaviour on a mistress whose character you could respect.

CLITANDRE

That is certainly not my intention, and if you knew what my heart desired, you would not suspect me of an idea as unjust as it would be barbarous.

CIDALISE

Then you no longer love Célimène at all?

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CLITANDRE

No, I swear I do not: and, in compensation therefor, I know no one who inspires me with such sovereign contempt.

CIDALISE

Take care, Clitandre! You think you hate her, and when one hates where one has tenderly loved, the heart is very far from cured.

CLITANDRE

I have certainly hated her, and with a violence that I should find it difficult to express to you. But now my only feeling towards her is a cold, quiet contempt with which she could not fail to inspire everyone, could they know, as I do, how much she deserves it. I mean the kind of contempt that you who know her so well feel for her.

CIDALISE

I wonder if it is Araminte who has so utterly banished her from your heart; I can hardly believe it, and I warn you I should be annoyed if it were so.

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CLITANDRE

Araminte! But that is hardly credible. Try and think of a woman who could inspire some affection at least.

CIDALISE

But what is she doing here?

CLITANDRE

I fancy I can imagine; but that does not mean that I love her.

CIDALISE

But if you did not feel disposed to treat her better, why did you not let her stay in Paris, because, jesting apart, it was without any invitation from me, and indeed without breaking the matter to me at all, that she came and established herself here; and I tell you plainly I should be glad if she would go.

CLITANDRE

So, I protest, should I. I will even assure you that if she does not go, I will.

CIDALISE

No, Clitandre, she will stay and you will not go.

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CLITANDRE

Truly, Madame, it is very singular that you should think it possible for me to stay in a place where one has the misfortune to find an Araminte, especially when she is meditating a display of affection.

CIDALISE

Come, my dear Count, I am your friend and I think you do not doubt my discretion. Since she has, by the chances of conversation, become our subject, open your heart to me, and conceal nothing of what has passed between you and her. [*He reflects.*] Come, I beg of you: after all, since you have admitted to me that she has been your mistress, need it cost you so much to tell me how she became involved with you?

CLITANDRE

You are right, and I certainly feel that I ought not to refuse what you ask; but these are matters about which, whether from principle or prejudice, I feel some reluctance to speak. It is not that I do not realize how little consideration she deserves, and that a thousand others could say of her what she has allowed me to discover; and yet . . .

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CIDALISE

These scruples are somewhat far-fetched. I know that she has been your mistress. I have nothing to learn but the details.

CLITANDRE

That is true, and it is precisely because of it that I do not understand your curiosity. Adventures of that kind have so little variety that one is like a thousand others. But since you wish it, I will conceal nothing.

CIDALISE

Before you begin, draw that curtain a little further. I cannot see.

CLITANDRE

At the beginning of the summer, I had gone to stay with Julie in the country. There was a large company, among others Araminte, whom no one wants and who invites herself everywhere. I was beginning to recover a good deal from the suffering that Célimène's inconstancy had caused me, and from day to day my liberty became more and more

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burdensome. I was burning to take up the fight again and, if you will allow me to say so, my heart, which you had so deeply wounded when you first appeared in Society, began to turn towards you once more. But you were still in love with Eraſte. I was convinced of the futility of such aspirations. The certainty of failure and the fear of becoming tedious and displeasing if I pursued you with that tiresome obstinacy which we think is called for when once we have made plain our feelings, kept me silent.

CIDALISE

You did well. I was indeed very much in love with Eraſte: and you could not possibly have succeeded.

CLITANDRE

I had also some reasons for thinking that I should not have been any more fortunate had you been free. However that may be, I never once thought of telling you the perfidy of which he was guilty almost daily. I was sure that such confidences would only upset you, and after careful reflection, I thought I had better keep silent about my own feelings and his infidelities.

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CIDALISE

The ungrateful wretch! And how I loved him! However, you may believe me when I tell you that since he compelled me to break with him, it was not long before I began to feel towards him that profound indifference which can never again be overcome.

CLITANDRE

In that case he was very foolish not to have appeared on the scene sooner; for, if I may reveal his intentions, he only came here to compose his differences with you, a project in which he hopes to succeed.

CIDALISE

It is but one stupidity the more; but I confess I wish he had fallen sincerely in love with me.

CLITANDRE

Ah! there is still love in such a wish!

CIDALISE

I agree that one might suspect it; but I give you my word that in saying so I have no single idea in my mind with which I could reproach myself.

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CLITANDRE

To speak frankly, I find it so hard to believe that you loved him, that I shall not find it difficult to believe that you have ceased to do so. But since we are on this point, I wish you would tell me how such a disagreeable little object, so devoid of pleasing qualities, and with such wretched health . . .

CIDALISE

Ah, Clitandre! you will not do me the injustice of thinking the last item a matter of importance.

CLITANDRE

Indeed, no. But I always think that a lover who makes a profession of being ill must be less amusing than another. You will surely agree that if it is not a reason for rejecting a man, it can hardly be one for accepting him.

CIDALISE

And it was certainly not that which determined me in his favour. Good heavens! what a strange feeling love is. When I observe to-day this same personage, who so little while ago had so much power over

me; when I judge in cold blood this man who so imperilled my heart, I confess that I can hardly believe that he could have turned my head as he did, and I feel perfectly furious with myself.

CLITANDRE

You are quite sure, then, that you will never come together again?

CIDALISE

What an idea! At the time when I was almost expiring with regret at losing him, he tried vainly to get me back, and with my present attitude of mind there is little fear that he could succeed now.

CLITANDRE

[*Anxiously.*] Are you thinking of taking another lover?

CIDALISE

No, I assure you; but if I were to fall in love, I flatter myself that I could overcome it, so that even the object of my affection should not suspect my feelings.

CLITANDRE

Cruel! How can you cherish such intentions?

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CIDALISE

And what does it matter to you if. . . But go on with your story.

CLITANDRE

Do you think I have nothing more interesting to tell you?

CIDALISE

I do not know; but you could not tell me anything that would amuse me more.

CLITANDRE

What you say is perhaps rather less than courteous; but your words wound my heart more than they mortify my pride.

CIDALISE

Oh, spare me please: am I to wait for ever? You are really intolerable.

CLITANDRE

Well, then: when Araminte saw me she destined me *in petto* for the honourable employment of amusing

her. You are aware of the despatch with which she makes an acquaintance; you know her indecorous familiarity, and her still less decorous methods of allurements. We are all rakes, I suppose; and I had nothing in my heart which could help me to withstand her. She did not touch me, but she tempted me. I addressed her in the style that suited her character and the kind of impression that she made upon me. Far from being offended with me, desires which were hardly flattering to her and were expressed with something less than tenderness, seemed to her a violent passion which she could not satisfy too soon. The lively, indeed almost brutal, manner in which I expressed my intentions succeeded in securing her regard. I spoke to her with excessive freedom, which she took for gallantry. I was not desirous, as you may well believe, of a settled affair with her; but I thought she would serve me for a brief diversion, and I decided to amuse myself with her as long as she stayed with Julie. When we were coming back from a walk it so happened that we found ourselves in a little grove where there was not much light. It also happened that we had, without observing it, become separated from the rest of the

company. The place seemed to favour my taking the extremest liberties, and she seemed to be so very ready to tolerate them that I hardly know how she refrained from thanking me. She requested me with all the politeness in the world to desist, while she allowed me to continue with a patience that I could not but admire. But she was overcome by faintness, and—I shall never cease to blame myself for this—I was unworthy enough to abuse the condition to which I had reduced her.

CIDALISE

Good heavens, Clitandre! how could you!

CLITANDRE

Yes, Madame; want of respect could go no farther; I am still ashamed.

CIDALISE

But you will pardon me, Clitandre; are the facts exactly as you have related them?

CLITANDRE

They are so simple that I am surprised that you

should think there was any matter for a story. You know me well enough to be aware that I do not commonly lie. Besides, all this is but a sudden explosion of the emotions; and such happenings have latterly become as remarkable for their frequency as they were formerly, or so we pretend, for their rarity.

CIDALISE

I must confess that I know Araminte has had several affairs, and that she is not generally held to be unkind. But she is thoughtless and rather spiteful. Her conduct no less than her tongue is uncontrolled. I had thought that calumny had perhaps been too busy with her name and she was really more given to flirtation than intrigue. You surprise me, indeed. And then?

CLITANDRE

I am not without the sense of politeness: and though she did not reproach me, I thought that it was only decent that I should make my excuses. She accepted them as a further manifestation of my amiability, and was so delighted that she insisted that I should go and repeat them in her room when every one had

gone to bed. There was, as you will see, very little sentiment about the commencement of the affair, and I think she had herself adopted an attitude in which she could hardly demand it. But I must be fair: at first she thought no more of it than I did. The supper party was remarkably cheerful, and she honoured me with all the favours that a woman, whose sense of conduct is not particularly strict, can bestow in a rather numerous company. I received them with propriety, or rather with impropriety, since I responded to her advances. However, merely from vanity, I begged her to restrain herself a little. After supper she became disgustingly affectionate. At last every one went off to bed, and I lost no time in going to her room.

CIDALISE

So you went?

CLITANDRE

But, of course: what could I do? Would you have had me break my word? She was expecting me. I found her in bed, and I protest that after all the liberties that she had allowed me, she could hardly be shocked if I took my place beside her. Indeed,

the only thing she asked me was to be kind enough to put out the candles or to draw the curtains. This seemed to me merely a caprice, and I disapprove of them, so I refused quite definitely to comply with her wishes. When she saw that I was not going to give way she was kind enough not to insist. The candles remained alight and the curtains were not drawn. We betook ourselves to the gentle familiarities of love, and I was on the point of being laid once more under the ultimate obligation to her, when she was seized by a tender solicitude. She remembered that I had not yet said that I loved her, and she protested that if I did not reassure her as to my feelings, however extreme the attraction she might feel for me and whatever proofs of her weakness she might already have given, she would certainly be able to overcome them. I was well aware that if she had loved me, she would hardly have been satisfied with the feelings that she had inspired; but decency, and the position in which I found myself, left me no alternative but to deceive her, and I replied that I could not understand how, with the definite proofs that I had given, she could persist in doubting my regard for her. Up to this

point her demonstration of affection had seemed a little restrained; but the conviction that she was loved dismissed her scruples, and she displayed a tenderness, animation, and an ardour beyond all description. Ah, Madame, if you could have seen her! It was indeed exquisite. . . .

CIDALISE

[*Drily.*] I can believe you, Monsieur le Comte, but you may spare me all these agreeable details.

CLITANDRE

Well, then, although I had much more reason to complain of her than to be grateful, I conceived that politeness called for the expression of some acknowledgements: and though they hardly came from the bottom of my heart, I inspired them with so much gallantry, and she was so delighted with them, that she used every inducement to make me repeat them. Indeed, as I think of it, she seems a worthy creature. Yet, in spite of my obligations to her, and in spite of the disordered condition of mind which the first favours of a woman always produce in our sex, whether or not we receive them with rapture, I had

begun to think that I should have been happier still, and should have had the less recourse to my imagination, if nature had endowed her with charms as freely as she appeared to believe. I am unlucky enough to be extremely curious. I began to be tormented by my doubts, and I begged her to satisfy them. You will hardly believe what difficulty I had in inducing her to consent. Her modesty was mortally wounded by my suggestion.

CIDALISE

What a fantastic story: her scruple was indeed timely!

CLITANDRE

So she refused, but I persisted, and though she made some resistance, I induced her to yield. Oh, Madame . . .

CIDALISE

Well?

CLITANDRE

Such a monstrosity!

CIDALISE

You amaze me. I can't conceive what there can be

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so unpleasant about the creature. Her bosom is not perfect, but it is passable. She has a well-turned arm, quite a pretty hand, a tolerable foot, and I have heard that all this might lead one to expect . . .

CLITANDRE

Ah, my dear lady, if you knew how little such rules were to be relied upon, and how constantly we are being deceived by them in one way or another, you would not be surprised that Araminte failed to fulfil what she appeared to promise.

CIDALISE

I can quite realize that before the adventure in the grove you judged Araminte as I did; but I cannot conceive how, after that, you could have visited her in her room with as much eagerness as if you had found her charming.

CLITANDRE

If I had the honour to be a little better known to you, you would not ask me that question. Besides, after what she had done for me, how could I refuse to go and see her? I had no alternative but to comply

with her wishes, or to run away. The latter course would doubtless have been the wiser; but unfortunately it did not occur to me. Moreover, our adventure in the grove disclosed less than you think. These shameless attacks give little chance for investigation, and if I had no reason to think her person perfect, I had certainly had no opportunity of finding it so inelegant as in fact it is.

CIDALISE

What I do not understand is that a woman like Araminte, as you describe her, should be so given to intrigue. Surely pride should take the place of principle in such a case: for even supposing, at her entrance into Society, she believed herself possessed of all the charms imaginable, it is hardly possible that all her lovers could have agreed to flatter her vanity, or, if they had the politeness to humour her, or the insincerity to pretend to admire her charms, one would have thought that the brief duration of the liaisons to which she aspired, and a thousand other circumstances which serve to open our eyes to the truth about ourselves, would have undeceived her.

CLITANDRE

This is a matter in which we are as insincere, or as polite, as you like to believe us, and in general we part from a woman without trying to humiliate her, unless we must to save our vanity. It is certain, of course, that if I had known how greatly Araminte's generous confidence in her charms was misplaced, I should never have taken her: I was, however, placed in an extremely awkward position. There are few of us who have not been her lovers; but there is not a man of any consideration who has thought fit to boast of her favours, and though she may be regarded as the best known woman in France, she is one about whom very little information is available. She is, in fact, the sort of type we do not talk about, either out of consideration for ourselves, or from malice towards our friends.

CIDALISE

But you knew her not at all, then?

CLITANDRE

Pardon me: I knew her as we all know each other. I had met her twice in Julie's box at the Opera; I had

dined in her company at Julie's house about the same number of times; and I had met her at the Court in the Princesses' apartments. But on all these occasions we had spoken but little with each other, and whether from consideration for my attachment to Célimène, or because, contrary to her custom, she was engaged in some settled affair at the Court, she displayed an indifference towards me which I wish she had had the kindness never to abandon.

CIDALISE

Indeed, at present I find no difficulty in believing that. But I wish that irritating curtain would not keep slipping: please arrange it so that we need not attend to it again.

CLITANDRE

I can do better than that, if you will allow me: you are not prudish and I am not impertinent. I will sit on your bed. [*She makes room for him.*]

CIDALISE

But you must at least have found in her the charms which usually appeal to you. You doubtless understand what I mean.

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CLITANDRE

None whatever.

CIDALISE

That I can hardly believe. After what you have told me of her raptures, her animation . . .

CLITANDRE

You are mistaken. All these raptures were no more produced by what you think than by love itself, which certainly did not come into question at all. It was all a gratuitous performance: pure generosity on her part, or, to be more exact, the habit of deception. She knows that women whom we cannot rouse do not please us, and she merely simulated so much ardour to make me believe that she loved me and to awaken a suitable response.

CIDALISE

But since she had really so little sensibility, why did she wish to see you so ardent?

CLITANDRE

She has a lively and disordered imagination, and though the futility of certain attempts that she has

made should have induced her to desist, she will not allow herself to think that she is by nature more unfortunate than others, and she deludes herself into believing that it will always be her latest lover whose feelings will be aroused to the desired extent. I am sure that this idea is the cause of all her disorders, and explains the trouble she takes to feign what she does not feel. Added to which, women of this kind are extremely vain, and, without in the least wishing to see a man reduced to this painful extremity, they feel that their pride demands it, just as ours sometimes compels us to make efforts which are beyond our strength and our desires. I will go further: it has been established to-day that it is the women who are the least in need of the pleasures of love that pursue them most frantically, and that three-quarters of those who ruin themselves are endowed by nature with all the gifts which they need to preserve them from such a fate.

CIDALISE

I am quite as well aware of that as you are, and I find it even more difficult to understand than you do.

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CLITANDRE

I must confess we live in a most agreeable age, delightful to contemplate with the philosophic eye.

CIDALISE

Well, then, let us now do what this age seems never tired of doing: do not let us think. Did the excellent Araminte find you worthy of all the favours she was good enough to bestow on you?

CLITANDRE

You must think me singularly devoid of vanity and extremely sincere to ask me such a question. There are a vast number of women to whom I should lie if they addressed such a question to me.

CIDALISE

It would be entirely indifferent to me.

CLITANDRE

So I should imagine: so to tell you the truth, if she had reason to regard the moments she bestowed on me as not entirely wasted, yet she had no grounds for regarding them as employed to the very best advan-

tage. She touched my fancy so very slightly, and I was no longer young enough for vanity to take the place of the feelings which she failed to inspire in me, so you may suppose that our conversation sometimes languished. Not knowing what to do with the great creature, being too familiar with her absurdities to get any more amusement from them, unable with decency to leave her so early, and in some fear of finding the situation wearisome, I diverted myself by trying to discover whether she was really so extraordinarily affectionate as she thought she ought to appear. In spite of the adroitness with which she impersonated a character not her own, I had pretty well found out what she was like. But since women are extremely capricious about certain things—a matter which one will think undeserving of the slightest attention is of considerable importance to another; some, by a singular perversion of mind, prefer illusion to reality: since, in fact, each of them has her own ideas, her own follies even, I thought that as the serious aspect of our encounter interested her so little, I had better try her with the details. This was not only the most reasonable course to take, but also—and this may

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surprise you—the least unbecoming. I trust that you will be able to guess, Madame, what I had the honour to say to her.

CIDALISE

You can hardly suppose that I shall reply to your question. And did your attentions meet with any success?

CLITANDRE

I nearly died of boredom and fatigue. At last, sick of her and of my stupid curiosity, I went back to my own room, vowing that I would never try any more such experiments, at any rate with so little reason for making them.

CIDALISE

Was she your mistress for long?

CLITANDRE

Longer than she ought to have been: five or six days, I believe, more or less.

CIDALISE

What! This woman you found so detestable? You libertine!

CLITANDRE

When we came back to Paris we behaved as if we had met while taking the waters somewhere. We fell in with each other more than once and spoke of trivialities, without even knowing the reason for our behaviour: there was nothing between us but the merest politeness. Finally, about a month later, I met her at a dinner party which Valère was giving at that little house of his. Luscinde, Araminte, Julie, and a little country lady were the women. The men were Valère, Oronte, Philinte, and I. The dinner was excessively merry: afterwards we all separated to different parts of the garden. Araminte, who during dinner had remembered having seen me somewhere, and had made some affectionate advances to me, told me when we were alone that she had some important news for me, and that a great happiness had come to her. I guessed at once what she meant, and my first impulse was to believe her. But we were alone: I had dined; I remembered that it was never safe to take her word, and I insisted on seeing whether she had spoken the truth. Will you believe, Madame, that she had lied?

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CIDALISE

I had suspected it. So disgraceful a piece of perfidy did not, I suppose, inspire you to enter into relations with her again.

CLITANDRE

Again? I could have beaten her! But since that unhappy night she has thought she had the right to pursue me: she made up her mind that by all the rules I am obliged to be her lover; and she has followed me, tormented me, and worn me out. Let her beware: people are only kind to her because they think she does not matter; it will ruin her if I decide to speak.

CIDALISE

But, Clitandre, are you not passing over certain attentions, certain affectionate letters, protestations of eternal love, a thousand things, in fact, that men think nothing of, but to which we women are always unfortunate enough to attach too much importance? Is it really true that you found so little pleasure in possessing her, and that her conquest took no longer than you have described?

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CLITANDRE

It is true, Madame, I give you my word. Affection, attraction, pleasure, all this went for nothing in our affair; and her present behaviour to me is an abominable injustice. When she arrived here she informed me with dignity that she came to demand an explanation. I replied with all the respect that I have for her sex, and all the contempt which her person could inspire, that there was nothing between us that called for any explanation. When she saw me so well armed against her dignity, she took refuge in sentiment and begged me to go to her room to-night, or to receive her in mine, and I warmly assured her that I would do neither.

CIDALISE

That was indeed the best thing you could do: and as a matter of fact it was not in that room that I believed you likely to be occupied.

CLITANDRE

It was your room, and yours only, as you see, that attracted me. But on which of the women that are now staying in your house had your imagination bestowed me?

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CIDALISE

Why, Julie, of course.

CLITANDRE

Julie? But do you imagine her to have been my mistress?

CIDALISE

Your mistress? Really, what a question!

CLITANDRE

Your enquiry does not, I confess, seem to me so out of place as it does to you. I like Julie very much, but I am surprised that you should think that I have such intimate relations with her when, as a matter of fact, I have never paid her any attentions at all.

CIDALISE

I fancy I know what I am talking about. But what is the matter, Clitandre? You are shivering. Is it at the recollection of Araminte?

CLITANDRE

I would not be surprised if the thought of her had that effect, for I never recall her without a feeling of disgust.

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CIDALISE

But you look as if you were perishing of cold.

CLITANDRE

That is hardly remarkable: the night is getting rather chilly; I have nothing on but my dressing-gown, and it begins to feel rather thin.

CIDALISE

I am sorry for it. I wanted to hear about you and Julie, and I am extremely put out about this. What on earth do you mean by wearing nothing but a silk dressing-gown? What an extraordinary notion. But I can hardly suppose, at least I do not like to think, that you have nothing on underneath it.

CLITANDRE

That is precisely my case. And why not? It is only the beginning of autumn.

CIDALISE

[*Sharply.*] You may do as you please in your own rooms: but you will allow me to point out that you are hardly suitably attired to visit mine.

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CLITANDRE

[*Embarrassed.*] Indeed, you have made me feel quite uneasy, and I cannot tell you how ashamed I am to give you for the moment the impression that I intended to show you any want of consideration.

CIDALISE

[*With dignity.*] I hope I shall not be accused of ill-humour, or what is now called prudishness and formerly figured as modesty; but I cannot conceive what possessed you to enter my presence in such a condition.

CLITANDRE

[*Respectfully kissing her hand.*] Ah, Madame, your words truly pierce my heart. If I must confess it, I had only half-intended to come and see you. I did not know what I wanted, I was afraid of coming at an inconvenient time and, if you will allow me to speak freely, the idea of the rendezvous that I supposed you to have made tormented me beyond endurance. But the desire to know whether in fact you had any such engagement began to be too strong for me: I allowed myself to be undressed mechanically, and it was only then that I made up

my mind to come and see you. My mind was confused and preoccupied, our conversation began at once, and I had not a moment to reflect on the condition I was in and, I regret to say, still am; for which I ask you as many pardons as if I had indeed intended to give you offence.

CIDALISE

[*More gently.*] I am very glad that I have less cause for complaint than I thought; but I suppose you will agree that anyone else in my place would have found your conduct extremely wanting in consideration?

CLITANDRE

I should not have been surprised either if any other than yourself had suspected me of some designs that might betray less than a proper regard for your character; but you, Madame, who know me, who realize how deep is my esteem for you—although you are perhaps unaware how impossible it would be for me not merely to fail in respect for you, but even to entertain the idea; how can you think it necessary to call upon me for explanation?

CIDALISE

I do not, indeed, regard myself as the sort of person to be lightly treated, and you will not find it difficult to persuade me that you do not mean to treat me so. But let us change the subject: What about Julie?

CLITANDRE

Julie is certainly not perishing of cold, as I am, at this late hour, and I am not much concerned about her.

CIDALISE

I am equally indifferent about you, and whatever your condition, I must insist, if only to punish you, that you answer the question I was asking when you compelled me to interrupt.

CLITANDRE

You want a lively and vivid account of the affair?

CIDALISE

Certainly: as lively as you can make it.

CLITANDRE

Very well, then, since you make a point of it, I can

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suggest an arrangement which will facilitate the narrative, if you will consent to it.

CIDALISE

And what is that?

CLITANDRE

But perhaps you will refuse.

CIDALISE

We can but see.

CLITANDRE

That . . . you give me the hospitality of your bed.

CIDALISE

Is that all?

CLITANDRE

Only that.

CIDALISE

[*Jestingly.*] You have lost your wits, Clitandre, you mistake me for Araminte!

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CLITANDRE

Indeed, I am guiltless of so gross a discourtesy. It is with the purest intentions in the world, I swear it. . . .

CIDALISE

After all I have been saying to you, it would be something inconsequent of me if I granted your request.

CLITANDRE

Surely, Cidalise, what does a little inconsequence matter when a man's life is at stake?

CIDALISE

Really, Clitandre, you are mad: you should be under restraint.

CLITANDRE

But can it be that you doubt my respect for you?

CIDALISE

No, I am very ready to believe that you have a deep respect for me, and as I like to think so, I shall certainly not give you the opportunity of losing it.

CLITANDRE

Think a moment: we are alone. All your people are far away, except Justine, who would not be much assistance to you since there is no one so difficult to awaken. You would be almost unprotected against an outburst of passion on my part, if I were so far to forget what is due to you as to risk your displeasure; and yet you will observe that though I find you more agreeable than any other woman, I have not made to you a proposal of any kind. I cannot see why you should think me more likely to misbehave myself in your bed than outside it. I beg of you to grant me what I ask: it is surely a matter of small consequence.

CIDALISE

[*Angry.*] Really, Clitandre, you go too far. I will never consent.

CLITANDRE

Very well, Madame. I will spare you the trouble of consenting. [*He takes off his dressing-gown, flings it down by the bedside, leaps into CIDALISE'S bed and takes her in his arms.*]

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CIDALISE

[*In a fright.*] Clitandre! If you do not get out of my bed—if you do not leave me alone: if you do not go away, I will never speak to you again.

CLITANDRE

[*Warmly.*] But, Madame, reflect: remember that your cries may be heard: suppose anyone were to come, what do you suppose they would think of our present situation.

CIDALISE

[*Furiously.*] They may think what they please: I will expose myself to any suspicions rather than become, in fact, the victim of your audacity.

CLITANDRE

Ah, Madame, even Lucrece did not think as you do.

CIDALISE

[*Violently.*] I believe that you are being insolent enough to jest.

CLITANDRE

That would indeed be inappropriate, as I have had

the misfortune to make you so angry; I deny the imputation with more sincerity than you give me credit for.

CIDALISE

[*Still in the same tone.*] Come, Sir, it is infamous of you to abuse, as you are doing, my regard and my friendship for you. Leave me; I detest you. Leave me, I say.

CLITANDRE

If I held you back it was much less with the intention of doing you a violence, than to prevent you from committing an indiscretion. There—I have let you go: have you anything to fear? Yet I am by your side: can you not trust my good behaviour?

CIDALISE

Silence! I loathe you. What do you suppose my people will think to-morrow when they see my bed?

CLITANDRE

Nothing at all, Madame; for I will make it before I go.

CIDALISE

No doubt you will do that extremely well.

CLITANDRE

You shall see. Come, do not detest me so much: come a little closer to me and be reassured by the calmness of my demeanour.

CIDALISE

You may be quite sure that if your conduct is not entirely correct I shall hold you in the bitterest aversion for ever.

CLITANDRE

Very well. May you hate me as much as I wish that you could love me, if I give you the slightest cause for complaint.

CIDALISE

I will not even tolerate a familiarity of any kind, however slight.

CLITANDRE

That is rather hard. Never mind, I agree: no familiarities; in any case it would only mean a further humiliation for me.

CIDALISE

I wish you really thought so.

CLITANDRE

I do not know how other people feel about these things: as far as I am concerned I have never found it agreeable to be refused. Were we not talking about Araminte?

CIDALISE

No, we have finished with her. But do you seriously contemplate staying where you are?

CLITANDRE

Really, Madame, I understood that the matter was arranged and that our conditions had been agreed.

CIDALISE

[*Laughing.*] Although I am certainly very angry with you, I cannot forbear from laughing at this extraordinary incident.

CLITANDRE

I really think it is much wiser of you to take it in that way than to lose your temper over the matter.

CIDALISE

Why, may I ask, have you so obstinately insisted in

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accommodating yourself where you are not wanted, when there are so many other apartments where you would have been received with open arms?

CLITANDRE

I feel quite certain that Araminte would have been as kind as you describe, but I think she is the only one here who would have so received me.

CIDALISE

And the only one perhaps from whom you would not have accepted the favour. If Julie, for instance

. . .

CLITANDRE

As a matter of fact, Julie attracts me no more than Araminte, or, I would rather say, I have no desire for either of them; still, it is true that, if Julie were willing, I should not treat her as sternly as the repellent personage whom you have mentioned. Surely that is quite intelligible.

CIDALISE

That is to say, that you found in Julie more of that sort of sensibility that appeals to you than the other was able to display?

CLITANDRE

But supposing they were equally gifted in this important article, surely Julie deserves the preference?

CIDALISE

Undoubtedly. But supposing, as you put it, they were not equally gifted in this matter, you would hardly listen to anything against the more agreeable of the two?

CLITANDRE

Then you really believe that when we find this virtue in a woman it takes the place of everything?

CIDALISE

No, but I am sure that it will induce you to forgive a great deal.

CLITANDRE

It certainly increases their charms: for most men that is to say: for we are not all in agreement upon this matter.

CIDALISE

As far as I can make out, you are just as unfair to us on this point as you are on many others. A woman

like Araminte wearies you. If she pretends to charms that she has not got, you are disgusted: if she possesses them, you are afraid of her. How ought they to behave in this matter to please you, or, at least, not to cause you uneasiness?

CLITANDRE

They ought, like you, Madame, to possess that restrained sensibility which a lover must discover for himself, which is awakened by his presence alone and is dependent only on his caresses: and which others would aspire to arouse, but in vain.

CIDALISE

Might I ask from whom you obtained all this excellent information about me?

CLITANDRE

From Eraсте, of course, since Damis is not among my acquaintance.

CIDALISE

The wretch! It is true, then, that men discuss such things together?

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CLITANDRE

Yes, when, as often happens, they have nothing else to talk about.

CIDALISE

How abominable!

CLITANDRE

I am quite willing to admit that it is not altogether seemly; but it is only from vanity that most of us ever speak ill of a lady: and vanity is hardly satisfied by a conquest that is not advertised.

CIDALISE

It is a pity that we women are not aware of this.

CLITANDRE

I should certainly not have given my confidence to him.

CIDALISE

Who knows?

CLITANDRE

Cidalise, you cannot doubt me: do you think that someone whom you honour with your regard could

act so infamously? You owe me an apology for that. Come, you are silent.

CIDALISE

That is because I do not think I have caused you any great offence. And, in any case, I would prefer to have to ask your pardon for having thought too ill of you, than to place myself in a position in which I should have to reproach myself for having thought too well of you.

CLITANDRE

You mean that you are in some apprehension lest you might become the victim of the confidence that you may see fit to place in me?

CIDALISE

I fancy that you do not greatly mind whether I think ill or well of you in this connection: and to be quite frank, I have not yet quite made up my mind about you.

CLITANDRE

[*Annoyed.*] There was no need to tell me that: I have long known that I was less than nothing to you.

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CIDALISE

Come, I should quite like you to quarrel with me, that would be a delightful display of vanity.

CLITANDRE

I have no doubt that you would suspect more vanity than feeling; but you must allow me to assure you that you would not necessarily be right.

CIDALISE

Oh, this is excellent! Do you want me to believe that you are in love with me?

CLITANDRE

[*Approaching her with an air of tenderness and humility.*]
But seriously, don't you believe it?

CIDALISE

No, upon my honour!

CLITANDRE

[*A little nearer.*] Your honour! You astonish me. I did not aspire to find you grateful, but I hardly thought you could be so ignorant.

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CIDALISE

[*With extreme seriousness.*] A little farther off, please.

CLITANDRE

I find your composure not a little offensive.

CIDALISE

[*Sharply.*] It may indeed annoy you, but it should not surprise you. As far as I can see you have laid the most deliberate plans, and conceived the most sinister hopes.

CLITANDRE

I do not think my conduct deserves such reproaches.

CIDALISE

Indeed, I know that it does not, and I am not aware that I am reproaching you; but I wish all the same that you would go away.

CLITANDRE

I would obey you without more ado, since my presence here is unfortunately disagreeable to you, if I did not think that there was a certain risk to your reputation if I were to leave you now. Araminte will

certainly come to see me, and I do not know what time she will choose for her visit. I am afraid that on opening your door I might find her at mine, which would be even more distressing, since, as you know, my room is opposite yours.

CIDALISE

Indeed? and why were you given that room?

CLITANDRE

I haven't an idea, but I should hardly have been put there unless you had assigned it to me.

CIDALISE

At what time do you propose to leave me?

CLITANDRE

How can I say? To-morrow morning. They do not get up very early in this house. I will go before any one comes, and no one will suspect that I have spent the night in your arms.

CIDALISE

In my arms! . . .

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CLITANDRE

Alas, indeed, I am wrong: it is you that are in mine, and your only response is to complain about it.

CIDALISE

Ah, don't remind me of our situation: I am covered with shame! However, we must provide for everything: supposing we fall asleep? It is true that Justine always comes in first, but I should be very annoyed if she found you here. It would be impossible that she should not think that, having done something so extraordinary as to let you stay here, I had nothing further upon my conscience.

CLITANDRE

It is certainly not likely: moreover, your unsociable conduct will have prevented you from sleeping; you will have found the time pass very tediously, and Justine into the bargain will think me the most fortunate man in the world, and will perhaps not keep her suspicions to herself.

CIDALISE

No, all things considered, I cannot accept such a

situation. It is at least doubtful whether Araminte will pay you a visit. In any case, it is now late: if she intends to come and see you, we may assume that she has already done so, and you will not persuade me that she will wait in the corridor until you have the kindness to let her in. No, once more, Sir, you must go: I wish it, I insist upon it.

CLITANDRE

Very well, Madame, since you are prepared to take the risk.

CIDALISE

Ah, the risk which you wish me to consider is as nothing, even if it can be said to exist, compared with that which you will force me to take if you stay here.

CLITANDRE

What have you to fear from me? The feelings which I have for you are not such as would ever make a man forget himself.

CIDALISE

[*Mockingly.*] Your feelings, indeed!

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CLITANDRE

You wish me to understand that you do not believe that I love you?

CIDALISE

[*Severely.*] I certainly do not believe it, but I shall perhaps be better able to tell you to-morrow than this evening, what I think of your feelings. I repeat, you will give me the greatest possible satisfaction if you will leave me, and I must beg you not to compel me to ask you again.

CLITANDRE

[*Warmly.*] You must forgive me if I oblige you to repeat it more than once. My happiness at finding myself in your company, in the way I am at present, is so delightful, in spite of the conditions that you have laid upon me. Really, Madame, is it conceivable that I should be thus received by the most charming woman in the world, by her whose favours would beyond all others move my heart; that I should hold her in my arms, press her to me, and that she should not allow me to make her mine when there is so little to keep us apart?

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CIDALISE

Indeed, you are treating me very high-handedly.

CLITANDRE

What? Will you always reward my attentions with this dreadful indifference?

CIDALISE

I have never been able to think your attentions very serious. I am quite aware that you sometimes find me desirable; but desire, Clitandre, is not love, and though you may use the very language of passion, I am too familiar with the ways of the world to be deceived. No, I tell you, you do not love me, and a thousand women would touch you in the same way as I have done.

CLITANDRE

How glad you are to think so! Cruel Cidalise!

CIDALISE

Clitandre, we have been friends too long for me to use those little evasions which we usually think are due to the modesty of our sex and which, as a matter

of fact, are merely a means to serve our vanity. I must beg you, on your part, to spare me all those shallow phrases, all that insincerity of intercourse with which you daily deceive so many. It would be disgraceful in you to speak to me of love without feeling it, and you must allow me to say that, apart from our friendship, you ought not to treat me so. Either you do not love me now, or—as I have the strongest reasons for thinking is not true—you have loved me for a long while.

CLITANDRE

Yes, Madame, I have loved you since the first moment that my good fortune brought me into your presence.

CIDALISE

In that case you will agree that you have not been averse to looking for distraction elsewhere. For, without taking into account such women as Araminte and her kind, since we have become acquainted, Aspasia and Célimène have been your mistresses. It was only Aspasia's death that broke the bonds between you; and if Célimène had not

betrayed you so grossly, you would still be with her. You must permit me to tell you that, if you love me as much as you say you do, it is very strange that you should have been able to become so deeply involved with others, and that you never made known your feelings to me.

CLITANDRE

But what could I do? When we made each other's acquaintance you were madly in love with Damis. He left you, and I was then in Italy. When I came back Eraste had attached himself to you; though he may not then have been your lover, you already liked him. Had I any opportunity of speaking of my affection for you?

CIDALISE

You did well to keep silent, since you thought me already with another; but you would perhaps have done better not to reach that conclusion so easily. It is also natural that I should suppose that if you loved me you would have tried to disengage me. Anyone else would certainly have done so; but, of course, everyone has his own principles.

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CLITANDRE

Mine are in no way peculiar to myself, and you would have found me at least as ardent as Eraste if you had replied less coldly to the letter I wrote to you from Turin about the inconstancy of Damis, and if you had seemed to take a little notice of the offer of my heart which I then made to you.

CIDALISE

True; it is certainly very singular that at a time when I was almost overcome with grief at the infamous conduct of a man who had been in my company since I came into Society, I should not have replied favourably to proposals which were certainly affectionate; but I ascribed them, I think rightly, to politeness rather than to love.

CLITANDRE

You would have ascribed them to their true cause if they had been agreeable to you. No, Madame, you would have found my love wearisome, and you would find it so still.

CIDALISE

That is possible: my peace of mind is very pleasant.

My two experiences have hardly disposed me to any further engagement, and I am not the sort of person to be continually passing from one man's arms into those of another. Though I am still very young, I am unfortunate enough to have had two affairs of the heart; and I despise myself for it. People were shocked at the inconstancy of Damis, and decidedly I did not deserve it; but they censured me for taking up with Eraste, and because I am affectionate and sincere, though weak indeed, perhaps I am considered a light woman, or at any rate not at all disinclined to become one. I ought and I wish to be forgotten.

CLITANDRE

Ah, Madame, when you took up with Eraste it was not this fresh engagement of your affection that offended public opinion: do you think that the object of them did not come into question at all? Society is perhaps somewhat dictatorial in this matter, but it insists that what appears agreeable to us shall be generally thought so, and will not forgive us for attaching importance to what most people find beneath their consideration; and you cannot be

ignorant of the fact that Eraste is hardly a universal favourite. I will go so far as to say that if you had chosen me the verdict would have been quite different. Eraste may excel me in personal charm, but I will venture to say that my character is more esteemed than his, and in support of this I need but remind you of what has happened to Célimène, whose reputation has suffered more for having left me than that of Araminte for having bestowed her favours on all and sundry. Your present attitude of mind will not last for ever. You are naturally affectionate and, if the misfortunes which you have suffered have made you afraid of love, they have not destroyed your need of loving. I must not weary you with my feelings, but if ever you wish to engage your affections once again I beg you not to forget that I have asked for your preference.

CIDALISE

It will be time enough to consider that when the situation arises. All that I can, and all that I ought to say to you now, is that I have more regard for you than for anyone else that I know, and I am willing to believe that I could have been as happy with you

as I was wretched with those two unworthy creatures to whom I gave myself.

CLITANDRE

[*Kissing her hand respectfully.*] Ah, Madame, you have said all that I could ask. At last I can speak to you about my love.

CIDALISE

Not the least in the world, I think. You agreed just now never to mention the matter, and I warn you that I will not give you back your word.

CLITANDRE

Ah, how can you think that I was serious when I gave it, and that I could keep silent about a passion that I have so long suppressed, now that I am glad to think that in breaking my promise I shall not displease you?

CIDALISE

I don't think I said any such thing, but please let us change the subject. You will not now perish of cold, and you will oblige me to remind you that you owe me the story of Julie.

CLITANDRE

Really, Madame, I hate to think that you still remember her existence. Besides, I have nothing to tell you about her.

CIDALISE

Ah, you are not going to be frank! Very well, then, I shall treat you in the same way.

CLITANDRE

I repeat, Madame, that I have nothing to tell you about Julie. If you knew how difficult it was for me to tell a story in bed you would not force me into these narratives.

CIDALISE

All these excuses are useless. We will either talk about Julie or we will not talk at all. For how long was she your mistress?

CLITANDRE

You must allow me to tell you that you are very obstinate. But even supposing that she had been my mistress and that there had been something extremely agreeable about our relations, distinguishing

them from all other affairs of the kind, this would be the most singularly inappropriate moment for such a story.

CIDALISE

For you, no doubt!

CLITANDRE

So much so, that if our adventure of this night were written down and if, at the present juncture, any question of this story arose, no one would hesitate to omit it, however promising it might appear.

CIDALISE

That would be according to the taste and the ideas of the reader.

CLITANDRE

I fancy no reader would care to have a situation which looks like interesting him interrupted by a long narrative.

CIDALISE

I cannot see what is interesting in our present situation. I admit that it is perhaps singular, and that it does not often happen that a man insists on being

accommodated in the bed of a lady who is in no way disposed to suffer such an impertinence. It would, and rightly, hardly be considered probable: and the woman's consent would seem even more improbable still. But the interest, the situation, I hardly see. . . .

CLITANDRE

Well, Madame, even if all you say is true, none the less I have no intention of making myself ridiculous by telling you stories, when I ought only to be speaking to you of my affection and attempting to make you feel and understand it.

CIDALISE

Then you have made your plans seriously and in earnest?

CLITANDRE

Yes, Madame, and it is not only to-night that I made them.

CIDALISE

I thought I had some reasons for thinking otherwise, and if it were not so late I could tell you what they are, but I am overcome with sleep, and I wish you would leave me in peace.

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CLITANDRE

Surely you are very inconsistent!

CIDALISE

That also is a subject on which I decline to enter. I may be inconsistent, unjust, and worse if you like; I will admit anything if you will only leave me.

CLITANDRE

If only you knew how reluctant I am to do anything of the kind!

CIDALISE

That may perhaps be true; but I do not think that this is an occasion on which I am called upon to consider your wishes in any way.

CLITANDRE

Come, let us be serious: what will you give me not to say that I have spent the night here?

CIDALISE

That, Sir, is a pleasantry in very poor taste: this is not a matter to be trifled with. When I think of my stupid good nature! . . .

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CLITANDRE

And when I think of my idiocy! . . . My only consolation is that since the affair is unbelievable, no one will believe it; and when one has been guilty of such gross stupidity, it is not a little gained if one can preserve one's self-respect.

CIDALISE

I understand you! You mean that you will not keep silence about this business and that you will not fail to boast of having gone as far as might be and spared me nothing?

CLITANDRE

Indeed, I hardly thought that what I just said could be so interpreted. But as regards that point, would you not grant me a few favours?

CIDALISE

Favours! I grant none or I grant them all.

CLITANDRE

Very well, then, all! [*Here he forgets himself rather seriously. She defends herself with violence and escapes him.*]

CIDALISE

[*In a cold anger.*] I observe, Sir, that though you have often been in my company, you do not know me any the better. I shall not defend myself against you by calling for assistance, which would only publish my foolishness. I am neither a prude nor am I acquainted with the arts of gallantry: I am not accustomed to indulge myself in outbursts of rage or explosions of virtue, and I shall not make a disturbance; but you will not succeed, and if it be true that you are attracted to me, you will suffer the regret of seeing me break with you for ever. You have now to decide upon your conduct.

CLITANDRE

Ah, Madame, how far am I still from the happiness that you seemed to promise me! Surely if your feelings towards me were as you described them, the extremeſt proofs of my love could not greatly offend you. Surely I have given you the moſt exacting testimony of my reſpect that you could ever require of me. I adore you! And if my paſſion for you were leſs violent—you are beautiful, and I am young. Our preſent ſituation is perhaps the moſt trying in

which a man could possibly find himself. I am consumed by desire, and you are well aware of it. Yet have I fallen short of the behaviour that you imposed on me? Have I strayed from the conditions, or have I abused my opportunity? I have at my mercy, or nearly so, the most agreeable woman in the world, yet have you not found me as discreet as I should now be in the company of that detestable Araminte who inspires me with such extreme disgust? I ask for no reward, and I do not wish you to think that you owe me any favours simply because I have not tried to take them by force. But surely the efforts I have made, which have cost me such pain that they must arise from the profoundest passion, should prove to you the sincerity of my feelings.

CIDALISE

I have a respect for men, and I observe with horror how much they are at the mercy of the moment. You did not come here with the intention of displaying so much affection, and though I daresay you have always had a sort of liking for me, and although I am ready to believe that it has increased since you have known that I was free, I have more than one reason

for thinking that your regard for me is not love. But you are unoccupied and alone in my company at night: and by an imprudence which I will never forgive myself, and indeed is hardly credible, I have allowed you into my bed. Even if you thought less of me, I could hardly fail to arouse desires in you, and more especially the desire to win a victim here and now in order that you might add the story of a singular adventure to your repertoire. Ah, you must agree that, whatever I may assume be your motives, this violent passion of yours, in which you are so anxious I should believe, owes not a little to the time and the opportunity.

CLITANDRE

I have not now to learn, Madame, that we are as dexterous in discovering reasons against what is disagreeable to us as we are ingenious in discrediting those which might interfere with our inclinations. You know very well, although you wish to appear to think so ill of me, that I have never been so ridiculous as to take indiscriminately such good fortune as I could, nor have I ever pursued women who were indifferent to me, merely to gain the credit

of their conquest. You have been willing enough to do me this justice in the past; but times have changed and I no longer look for justice at your hands. To obtain it I should have to love you as little as you wished me to. [*Here he kisses her hand with affection and respect, and continues to do so until her reply: she listens to him with great attention and with an air of extreme embarrassment.*] Ah, Madame, why go out of your way to think me a scoundrel? why be so cruel as to add to the contempt with which you respond to my affection? You do not love me: need you make me any more unhappy? You complain of my silence. Why? It is because I never dared to tell you that I love you that you now doubt my feelings. Alas, when could I flatter myself that such an avowal would not displease you? Could I ever have told you that I loved you without giving offence? Did you suppose me ignorant of your affairs, and could I think that you would forgive me had I thought you capricious or false? I now find you free, and since I am fortunate enough to be in like case, I could indeed speak to you of my affection; but my heart is so deeply touched that I cannot rid myself of my fears, and it is my eyes alone that dare to instruct

you. I thought that before discovering my affection I ought to try to dispose you to receive it. You have seen me constantly seeking your company, preferring it beyond everything, going only where I thought I should meet you, and knowing no other pleasure but that of passing my time with you. Very well, Madame, you may continue in your hatred of me: you will find me always constant and always at your service, preferring all the harshness to which you subject me above the favours which I might expect from another. My love is displeasing to you, and I consent never to mention it to you, provided that you will allow me to persist in my proofs of it.

CIDALISE

[*With emotion.*] Ah, traitor! Can I be so abandoned as to wish that you were speaking the truth? [*Here CLITANDRE takes her in his arms and she defends herself but feebly.*]

CLITANDRE

Cidalise! Oh, charming Cidalise! How happy you could make me if you wished!

CIDALISE

Do you imagine that you would be happy for long? If I were to give you my heart and everything that I should give you with it, should I not again fall, of my own free will, into that dreadful situation from which I have just escaped? I am still frozen by the recollection of my suffering, and I assure you that I look upon love with horror and that I wish I could hate you for your efforts to please me—efforts which, alas, may perhaps not be in vain!

CLITANDRE

[*Coming nearer.*] Do not, I beg you, give way to these melancholy ideas. Surely my past character might reassure you as to the future. Turn your eyes to me and, if you can, dismiss that apprehension from your gaze. [*She sighs.*] Can you not shake off these cruel fears, and will you always be sorry to find yourself in my arms?

[*She sighs once more, looks at him tenderly, comes nearer and—finds him far from being as respectful as he had promised.*]

CIDALISE

[*Defending herself.*] Clitandre! what are you doing?

. . . If you love me! . . . Clitandre! . . . let me go! . . . I insist.

[He obeys at last: she bursts into tears and indignantly recoils from him.]

CLITANDRE

[Hurt.] I observe too late, Madame, that, carried away by my ardour, and foolishly believing that you did not disapprove of it, I have exposed myself to your displeasure. The pain that my audacity has caused you shows me that I am the last person to whom you would grant the favours that I have just taken, and indeed I do not understand how I can have been blind to your feelings for so long.

[She does not answer: he is silent also, and sighs; at last, observing that he does not speak, she speaks to him.]

CIDALISE

[Sharply, without looking at him.] I think, Sir, that the time has come for you to leave me alone.

CLITANDRE

Madame, I agree. I will even obey what appear to be your orders, and I will leave you for ever.

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CIDALISE

Go, Sir! I hope that you will forget my imprudence, and that you will not bring it against me either in your own mind or in the company of others.

CLITANDRE

Ah, Madame, I may not be worthy of your affection, but I shall always deserve your esteem, and your attitude, harsh as it is, will never change the profound respect in which I hold you.

CIDALISE

[*Ironically.*] I like to hear you boast of it after the way in which you have treated me.

CLITANDRE

I shall not try to defend what has displeased you, although I should perhaps not find it difficult to justify myself; but it is your wish that I should appear guilty, and I should really think I was so, if I tried to make you see how unjust you have been to me. Time will instruct you, and I hope I may be spared its vengeance. Good-bye, Madame, I will . . .
[*He appears to be looking for something.*]

CIDALISE

[*Still not looking at him.*] What are you looking for?

CLITANDRE

Madame, my dressing-gown. In our present situation I think it would hardly be decent for me to appear before you without it.

CIDALISE

[*Still coldly.*] It is rather late now to be thinking of the proprieties. Wait a moment, you threw it down on my side of the bed, and I will give it you.

CLITANDRE

[*Turning impetuously towards her.*] Oh, cruel Cidalise, can you really let me go with so little regret, and can you overwhelm with your hatred one who loves you so tenderly?

CIDALISE

Alas, Sir, you are very well aware that I do not hate you.

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CLITANDRE

Then, if it be possible that I have been mistaken, let those lovely eyes, in which I but lately read so lively an indignation, deign to speak a softer language. [*She smiles at him affectionately.*] Yes, Cidalise, I can see in them some traces of that kindness which you have been sweet enough to show to me; but those feelings which you can see in mine, and which I cannot arouse in your heart, are still far away.

CIDALISE

[*After a few moments' silence.*] Must I? Do you really want me to say I love you? Very well, my cruel friend, enjoy your victory, I adore you!

CLITANDRE

Ah, Madame! . . . I am speechless with delight! [*He falls, sighing, on the bosom of Cidalise, and there remains as though overcome.*]

CIDALISE

I feel once more all those cruel emotions which have made my life so wretched. Why have you brought them back to me? I did not know, or rather I tried

not to realize the strength of the attraction that drew me towards you, and I should perhaps have quelled it if you had not tried to win my heart.

CLITANDRE

[*Ardently.*] Oh, it is too much! Your loveliness is more than I can bear: come, and let me breathe out my life in your arms.

CIDALISE

Spare me a moment, Clitandre. You know me, and since at last I have consented to surrender my heart, you may be sure that you will one day receive all that I can give you; but let me grow accustomed to my weakness, and allow me the consolation of not yielding myself like the poor creature whose deplorable behaviour we have just been discussing.

CLITANDRE

You can hardly be afraid that I should confuse you with her!

CIDALISE

If I had been fortunate enough to meet you before the others, and you had known my character better,

you would not have found me so hesitating and so timid; but my heart that I give to you now has been engaged before, and however precious you may find the gift to-day, I am very much afraid that you do not value it as you seem to do, and that your easy victory may one day turn your regard into contempt.

CLITANDRE

How can you suspect me of thinking ill of you, and how can you doubt my respect? I suppose you must, since you have said that I compare you with Araminte: hardly an agreeable remark to make.

CIDALISE

And yet perhaps not quite out of place: the manner in which I am giving myself to you . . .

CLITANDRE

And why should you not? You love me. Although you have only told me so to-day, it is not only now that I have first become aware of it. Your confidence in me; the sacrifices that you have made for me, without my having asked for them, and which you yourself perhaps never thought to make; the touch

of asperity that you have shown, kind as you are, to women of whom I saw too much, or whom I praised in your presence; your fears that I should not visit you here; your eagerness to seek me out, and the light I have seen in your expression; your ill-humour at the arrival of all these women; your anxious and troubled looks in my direction when you saw them; indeed, everything revealed to me your affection. Could you think that in such a state of mind, familiar with my presence through our long-established friendship, and therefore less on your guard against the freedom I allowed myself; certain of being loved, urged alike by your own passion and by mine, you could have resisted my ardour? And do you think it fitting to compare our relations with those of Araminte and myself?

[It will perhaps not be inappropriate to inform the reader at this point that while CLITANDRE is speaking he pays CIDALISE the most profuse attentions, which she does not exactly return, but to which she makes no very serious resistance.]

CIDALISE

[Answering his words rather than his actions.] To speak

quite frankly, I could not feel less disposed for love-making, and the only thing that gives me any pleasure at the moment is the thought that I could not have acted otherwise. And I must be deceiving myself, for you cannot imagine how difficult I find it to persuade myself of this.

CLITANDRE

I love you the more for it; but however I may admire your delicacy, I am distressed that you should use it to torment yourself.

CIDALISE

Alas, how can I be as easy in my mind as you would wish, when I reflect that one day perhaps you will find more reasons for blaming my conduct than you have given me to excuse it? [*His answer is a display of affection: she is silent too, but she resists him.*]

CLITANDRE

Cidalise, you are utterly unreasonable. If you cannot love me . . . [*She presses him tenderly in her arms.*] But how am I to believe you when I see that you are more influenced by your fears than your affection,

and when your conduct denies all the assurances that you have given me? Surely my desires deserve some recognition?

CIDALISE

You will certainly be unable to restrain them, and I perhaps shall not have the strength to resist them. [*Here he attempts some entirely respectful caresses.*] Good heavens, Sir! . . . can you not keep your word and respect my fears?

CLITANDRE

I will, since I cannot dismiss them from your mind. [*Here she yields to his caresses, and as she has foreseen, and perhaps hoped, he does not keep his word. The reader will not be surprised that she becomes annoyed.*]

CIDALISE

[*With a momentary display of dignity.*] Sir, please remember our compact.

CLITANDRE

I am not aware that we made one, except that we agreed to love each other for ever; but I beg you to

abandon that air and tone; they are hardly appropriate to our situation. The ceremonious attitude which you continue to adopt towards me makes me almost doubt that you have said that you loved me, and cannot tell you how deeply it distresses me.

CIDALISE

[*Rapturously.*] Oh, you should not for one moment be able to doubt my affection, and I should be more than happy if I could always see you as convinced of it as you will always have the right to be.

CLITANDRE

And yet how cold your kisses are, and while my heart flies to your lips and finds there the most delicate delights, you appear to draw back from these joys or to be incapable of feeling them.

CIDALISE

Ah, why do you misrepresent me so? Admit that you have been unjust to me.

[*The warmth of CIDALISE's demeanour seems in some measure to authorize CLITANDRE to attempt some further caresses. His familiarity, though not extreme, is more than*

she is prepared to allow, and she refuses once, and again. He is irritated, and gives way to a display of violence which, if not unprecedented, is at any rate unusual, and should teach women not to admit anyone to their beds in so lighthearted a manner.]

CIDALISE

[*Desperate.*] No! I will not. . . . You will mortally offend me! . . . There, now, Sir . . . See how I can rely upon your word!

[*Far from being restrained or turned from his purpose by these violent reproaches and by the resistance of CIDALISE, which he must realize to be serious, he continues to use violence—and succeeds. For what can she do, and how can she defend herself? She does not fail to reproach him with his insolence; but when a man has so far compromised with his courtesy, there is little merit and possibly still less safety in not persisting in his wickedness. So he continues most unworthily to abuse his superior strength. At last he looks at her with a smile and with as pleased an air as if he had done the most admirable thing in the world, and even tries to kiss her hand. The reader will easily apprehend that, after his disgraceful behaviour, this demonstration of gratitude, though entirely respectful, is somewhat coldly received.*]

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CIDALISE

[*Outraged, and in a tone of formidable displeasure.*] I must ask you to leave me, Sir! I am furious with you: your conduct is abominable.

CLITANDRE

But consider how unfair you are. Could you suppose, apart from any question of love, that the caresses of a woman like yourself would not make impossible the restraint which you imposed on me? And, indeed, what have you to complain of? Surely it is for me to be offended at seeing you refuse me the most ordinary familiarities. Really, you are extraordinary.

CIDALISE

Very likely: I see that I shall always be in the wrong. Yet this is not what you promised.

CLITANDRE

I do implore you to abandon the idea that in this matter I have been faithless enough to make any promises at all. Remember that the terms on which we now are make any impertinence on my part an

impossibility: when it is you who are offending against love, you are not to imagine that I am wounding your dignity.

CIDALISE

[*With much more gentleness.*] But do you really suppose that I am blind enough not to see that I shall one day give you all that you have now taken from me? You are right: if my resistance had no foundation it would be in the last degree ridiculous; but whether my motives are sensible or the reverse, you promised to respect them, and I think I have at least the right to complain that you have broken your word.

CLITANDRE

Are you really angry? Ah, come back to my arms. I am longing to pardon you your injustice. Come, you must not escape my clemency!

CIDALISE

[*Laughing.*] Truly you are extraordinarily absurd! Oh, Clitandre, how well I know you. [*She would appear to have more than one reason for saying so.*]

CLITANDRE

But you will be angry again?

CIDALISE

I should really have reason to be; but I see very well from the speed of your attack that I must do as you will, and, if only to catch you out, I should like to be a little less cruel.

CLITANDRE

To catch me out! And what, pray, may you mean by that?

CIDALISE

Am I really so unfair?

[The reader will here be good enough to suppose that this question is addressed to him. If by chance—though this is improbable—this passage should fall into the hands of a lady, she will learn from it never to offer an affront to anyone unless it is justly merited; that is to say, that in certain circumstances she must be careful before she speaks not to look at the mere probabilities of the case, or she may find herself in an awkward situation, and if she wishes to express a want of confidence that may be found offensive,

she cannot be too careful to make sure that her attitude will bring no unpleasant physical consequences upon herself.

Thus CLITANDRE proves to CICALISE, who first asks his pardon and then gets extremely angry, that she would have done much better not to display any doubts. She finds it useless to tell him that so innocent a pleasantry should not have such serious consequences. Whether he is really annoyed, or whether his attitude serves merely as a pretext, he certainly takes his revenge. However, all things considered, the affair had to come to a point in one way or another, and it was inevitable that she should have to complain of his conduct to an extent that she was probably not disinclined to think possible.

At this juncture CLITANDRE owes CICALISE the most tender acknowledgements, and indeed offers them. Though it is hardly likely that there can be any reader who has never been in a position to make or to receive such acknowledgements, or to say and to listen to those pleasing and passionate utterances of love's gratitude, though this may be called for, upon occasion, by the mere necessity of politeness, we shall here suppress the observations of our lovers, and we venture to think that the reader will have the less grounds for complaint, inasmuch as we only deprive him of certain incoherent remarks, which he will much sooner supply for

himself in accordance with his own feelings, than peruse here. It may indeed be possible that there are some few who may be ignorant of the manner in which such acknowledgements are offered and received, and would not be averse to obtaining some information; but we should be sorry to be the means of lending artifice to what should be a natural expression of gratitude, or to deprive the recipient of the pleasure of surprise.]

CLITANDRE

[Composing himself by the side of CICALISE, who hardly dares look at him without confusion.] What, my lovely Cicalise, must you always reproach yourself with having granted me happiness, or, rather, must you always punish me for having dared to secure it? I am certainly guilty; but if you would only be fair to yourself, you would not only find many reasons for pardoning my offence, but even for astonishment that I had not committed it before. *[She says nothing, sighs, and persists in looking away from him. He goes on.]* Come, raise your eyes: let them tell me what your lips will not utter—that you do not hate me. I cannot live for an instant in the fear of having displeased you. You would not have me perish of my regrets?

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CIDALISE

[*Still in an angry voice.*] Traitor!

CLITANDRE

Very well: cover me with all the reproaches you can think of: I daresay there are none that I do not deserve; but look at me once more. Tell me, I beseech you, what it is that is troubling you!

CIDALISE

Alas, how can I help being tormented by the fear of losing you?

CLITANDRE

[*Passionately.*] Ah, do not give way to these unworthy fears: I adore you; I love you more than I have ever loved or ever shall again.

CIDALISE

[*Looking at him with the deepest affection.*] Do you really love me still?

CLITANDRE

[*Tries to get rid of the fears of CIDALISE by the most*

ardent caresses. But, as this method of removing doubts is not favoured by every one, those of our readers who would find it inconvenient may try another: they may invent for CLITANDRE the most admirable sentiments—all that might be best calculated to reassure a lady in a situation of this kind.]

CLITANDRE

How ungrateful you are! Do you believe me now?

CIDALISE

Alas, Clitandre, how well I know that desire is not love!

CLITANDRE

That means that you still have no confidence in mine?

CIDALISE

[*With a sigh.*] My doubts would not be so misplaced as you seem to think. Your manner of replying to them indeed stifles them, but they are not destroyed.

CLITANDRE

Would you prefer my assurances?

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CIDALISE

That method of expressing your affection would not be so agreeable to your senses and would be less flattering to your vanity; but I confess that, false as your assertions might be, they would be more reassuring to my heart than these transports which take their place.

CLITANDRE

[*Warmly.*] How can you think for one moment that it is not an infinite delight to me to talk to you about an affection which penetrates my very soul? And the warmth with which you return it makes me believe that I never felt so in my life before.

CIDALISE

No, I cannot be as fortunate as that: my conquest cost you too little effort.

CLITANDRE

You are really very unreasonable.

CIDALISE

[*Rapturously kissing his hand.*] You do not know how

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much I love you, and how hateful it is to me to think that I have belonged to others: how I even hate you for having loved me so late! And when I think that, if you had wished it, I should not have had the misfortune to fall in with Eraſte, how can I prevent myself detesting you for having allowed me to take him?

CLITANDRE

But surely Eraſte was beginning to be agreeable to you by the time I came back?

CIDALISE

No; he was trying to make himself so, and if you had on your return made good what you had written, his efforts would have been in vain.

CLITANDRE

Ah, if only I had thought so! But how could I think you so favourably disposed towards my love when I observed you colder and more reserved with me than with anyone, hardly even showing me any friendship?

CIDALISE

The desire to avoid any entanglement and the fear that you more than anyone would be dangerous to my resolution, were the original causes of my coldness to you on my return: and my grief at seeing you renew your relation with Célimène, when in spite of my own feelings I flattered myself that you loved no one but me, aroused in me so violent a hatred of you, that I hardly know as yet how I have managed to get rid of it.

CLITANDRE

I must admit that I was not altogether unaware of your feelings, and that one day, from a word that you had let fall at the Opera and which I have often thought about since . . .

CIDALISE

[*Kissing him passionately.*] You ungrateful wretch! You understood, and you said nothing.

CLITANDRE

How could I? Éraste, whose intentions were well known to you, observing no doubt the impression

that you made on me, and fearing that I might one day speak to you about it, came round to see me the next day, and with an air of the greatest possible mystery told me, a month before you had taken him, that all had been settled between you, and it was this false confidence that prevented my understanding what you meant, and induced me to take up with Célimène once more.

CIDALISE

Indeed, I beg of you, do not let us talk about him any more. You cannot conceive how painful the recollection is to me, and how I despise myself for having yielded to that perfidious wretch, to a man whom, beyond all others, I was the least fitted to love.

CLITANDRE

I, too, cannot understand how I took up with Araminte and a dozen unpleasant creatures of the same kind.

CIDALISE

Belise, for instance.

CLITANDRE

She is pretty, at least.

CIDALISE

I agree; but she is everybody's prey.

CLITANDRE

Yes, I suppose that is more or less true: unfortunately for her she has a kind of indifference in her character which exposes her to the inconvenience of being unable to resist: for, without this, she would be much as other women.

CIDALISE

How was it that you became involved with her?

CLITANDRE

Involved indeed! I certainly took her, but without the slightest intention of keeping her. There is not a woman in the Kingdom whom I despised so much or whose conquest cost me so little trouble.

CIDALISE

But you took her, nevertheless.

CLITANDRE

Yes, I had to. I went to pay her a visit I owed her for some time. I don't know what her feelings

towards me were, but she made such very unmistakable advances, that, though even then I despised her, I could not help responding. And yet do you realize how degrading such conduct really is?

CIDALISE

You treat the matter lightly; but I assure you that nothing so dishonours a man as to be at the mercy, as you nearly all are, of every opportunity that presents itself.

CLITANDRE

But you can hardly imagine how we despise ourselves for these shameful exhibitions of weakness, when we find ourselves, as I confess was then the case with me, violently in love with some one else, and that a most charming woman—Aspasie herself.

CIDALISE

I am quite sure, in spite of that, that Belise believed that you had no thoughts but for her.

CLITANDRE

She is vain, and I am ardent. It was natural that at such a moment we should both deceive ourselves.

CIDALISE

Yet you adored Aspasia?

CLITANDRE

Of course I did. I loved her passionately.

CIDALISE

But how can you reconcile your affection for her with the kindness that you showed to Belise?

CLITANDRE

Ah, in my own heart I had not the hypocrisy to keep up such pretences, nor, fortunately, did I mistake my own feelings. Overwhelmed as I was with the favours of Belise, and even at the very moment when I was most nearly touched, you cannot conceive how remote she was from my heart, and how deeply I felt the influence of Aspasia.

CIDALISE

Indeed, I believe you. But you saw Belise again?

CLITANDRE

Yes. She had never, so she said, been to an intimate

supper party at a private house, and she begged me to give her one in mine. The terms on which we were made it impossible to refuse her whim. I will not indeed conceal from you that she amused me for a while, and that all my self-reproaches did not prevent my belonging to her for a month. It is true that Aspasic spent more than half of it away from Paris, and that the absence of the woman I loved had become really painful.

CIDALISE

You faithless creature . . . please leave me alone!

[In order to understand this observation, which appears to be quite inconsequent, the reader must know that CLITANDRE continues to tease and torment CIDALISE in one way or another: his advances are refused; he complains, and CIDALISE gives way. She must be understood to lament her display of feeling, and she is afraid that CLITANDRE will think this a reason for doubting her constancy. For otherwise the following conversation would not be very intelligible.]

CLITANDRE

It is very odd of you to imagine that I should reproach you with the warmth of your feelings, when

I found it so difficult to forgive Célimène her coldness.

CIDALISE

How entertaining! To look at her I should have supposed quite the opposite.

CLITANDRE

Few women are, in fact, as cold as she: and you cannot conceive how much one can be deceived by people's looks in this connection.

CIDALISE

Do I look like a lover, please?

CLITANDRE

[*Looking at her carefully.*] Yes, you have an affectionate languor in your eyes which is not at all unpromising.

CIDALISE

Ah, you plunge me in despair: I am so dreadfully afraid of being thought unduly affectionate. You do not know what you are saying. It may well be that this languor which you discover in my eyes is the

sign of a warm heart; but I should have thought that it was only very lively ladies that you accuse of . . .

CLITANDRE

Not we who have experience: we leave it to young people who are just entering into the world to believe that all women are endowed with these feelings, and that they are especially to be found in those with sparkling eyes and lively ways and a light-hearted demeanour. We, on the other hand, when we meet with a certain indifference, indolence, and modesty, know that we have found what we want.

CIDALISE

Célimène must have given you a great deal of trouble, did she not?

CLITANDRE

Much less than you would think. Either from caprice or vanity she loves above all things to be the object of a man's desires: at least, she takes pleasure in the transports of her lover. Moreover, though her senses may remain cold, her mind is quite capable of excitement, and if nature has denied her what is

called pleasure, she has been granted in compensation a sort of enjoyment which indeed has hardly any existence outside her ideas; but it is possible that she obtained thus more delicious experiences than she could get from her senses. You, who are more fortunate, have, if I am not mistaken, combined both delights.

CIDALISE

I don't know why, but I fancy I should like Célimène's part better than my own.

CLITANDRE

Do you mean that you would rather be only half as happy as you are? Do not be afraid. However much Célimène might excite her mind and whatever enjoyment she may have got from that condition, it was not always enough. Although, poor creature, she realized quite clearly that the limitations which nature had imposed on her could not be overcome, she longed none the less for that full fruition that she could never obtain. Her imagination caught fire: she revolted against the coldness of her senses and used every device to overcome it. The passion which burned in all her veins became at last an agony to

her, and more than once I have seen her weep from the violence of her desires, which she could neither quell nor satisfy.

CIDALISE

If she could not reach in your company the happiness that she looked for, I should not advise her to try anyone else.

CLITANDRE

Indeed, I greatly doubt if she has found it in her latest choice, for it is a gentleman somewhat after the manner of Eraste who has replaced me in her heart: I am also not so much flattered as surprised to find that she has affectionate recollections of me.

CIDALISE

Do you think you will take her back, Clitandre?

CLITANDRE

Just as little as you think you will take back Eraste, who, in whatever capacity you consider him, can hardly have been a satisfactory lover.

CIDALISE

[*Slightly annoyed.*] I find it rather odd that you should

think that the quite imaginary character that you have bestowed on him made him disagreeable to me: I would have you know that it was he who left me.

CLITANDRE

I am not surprised. That kind of lover, who is really only the impersonation of one, after giving a woman a great deal of trouble, invariably leaves her with as little consideration as if he did not care what she may say about him.

CIDALISE

To judge from your conversation you appear to have lived in the company of very singular women.

CLITANDRE

Not in the least. I beg you to believe that, with the exception of Aspasia and yourself, the women who have honoured me with their kindness could not have been more commonplace.

CIDALISE

But, as far as I can make out, you have been fond of some of them.

CLITANDRE

Certainly: what would you have me do? One lives in the world, one is bored, one notices women who can hardly be said to be amusing themselves: one is young, and vanity combines with idleness. If the possession of a woman is not always a pleasure, it is at least in some sort an occupation. Since love, or what is called by the name, is what women most enjoy, we do not find them always indifferent to our attentions. Moreover, the transports of a lover are the clearest proof of what they value. I have sometimes been at a loss for occupation: I have met with women who were perhaps not yet quite confident in the power of their charms, and that is how, as you say, some of them have become my mistresses.

CIDALISE

How regrettable! but I fancy you have told me more than once, and again to-night, that you have never indulged in casual love affairs?

CLITANDRE

No. Not, at any rate, for long; and I do assure you that I now find it hard to believe how and why I fell

into so distressful and pitiable a pursuit. At first it was in spite of myself, and thanks to the caprice of certain women who were then leading Society, that I became the fashion. The reputation that my first affairs brought me necessarily involved me in others. I really had no intention of winning all these women's favours, but it is a fact that very soon there were no women in Paris, whose vices rather than their attractions made them generally available, who did not think themselves obliged to possess me and whose kindness I did not feel called upon to accept. What can I say? My head was turned, and to such an extent that without the influence of Aspasia, whom I attacked in the same way as all the others, but whose virtues I was forced to respect—indeed, it was only when I tried to imitate them that she began to approve of me—I should probably be behaving with all the perversity which made me then so brilliant and so foolish.

CIDALISE

So you think you are quite cured?

CLITANDRE

Yes, though perhaps I paid too little for my cure,

but in case Aspasia has omitted anything, I am in your hands, and I know no one more worthy to finish her work than the only woman who, in her stead, could have begun it.

CIDALISE

[*Embracing him.*] Ah, Clitandre! [*He teases her.*] Oh, please let me alone! It seems impossible to offer you thanks without being made to pay for it.

CLITANDRE

I must be intolerable, I know. [*Fresh transports from* CLITANDRE: CIDALISE *is at first angry and finally shares them.*]

CIDALISE

[*Seeing him smile.*] Ah, Clitandre, I lie in your arms almost expiring from love for you, and you find nothing but amusement in my weakness.

CLITANDRE

I should never have believed, I do assure you, that you would have found anything in my eyes to justify that reproach. I can but say that if I found such a

look in yours, I should be more inclined to congratulate myself than to complain of it.

CIDALISE

Clitandre, I beg of you not to deceive me. I don't want to boast about my feelings, but if you knew how sincere they are and how deeply I love you, you would be ashamed of only having an ephemeral love for me.

CLITANDRE

But you cannot have any love for me if you have any doubts of mine for you!

CIDALISE

[*Kissing him passionately.*] No love for you! Oh, Clitandre!

CLITANDRE

[*Taking her in his arms.*] It is my turn to beg you to have no doubts of me: remember how your hesitations hurt me. Let us enjoy in peace the happiness of our mutual love, and do not let us trouble about anything else. Your affection can only equal mine if it is true that I can ever inspire in you as much love as you do in me.

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CIDALISE

Ah, do not doubt a heart which is wholly yours: do not doubt a woman who forgives herself much less easily than you forgive her, and who is perhaps not too pleased to find you so undisturbed by the use she made of her affections before she became yours.

CLITANDRE

What? Would you have me so unjust as to? . . .

CIDALISE

Yes; I wish no one could utter the name of Eraſte or Damis in your presence without making you flush; that if I had the misfortune to meet them, you should feel as deeply injured as if I had tried to see them again. If you knew how I detest the women that you have loved, or with whom you have merely philandered, you would think shame that you do not regard these two as your mortal enemies.

CLITANDRE

It would perhaps be not so much unreasonable as dangerous for me to begrudge them a happiness

they no longer possess. I adore you: do not expect jealousy of me. If you knew to what excesses the passion of jealousy would drive me I am sure you would not have me feel it.

CIDALISE

What should I care? You may be unjust, suspicious and cruel. Whatever the proofs I may give you of my affection, I would have you never believe that I love you enough. You may be as jealous as you like—I shall never complain.

[CLITANDRE, *who continues to display more courtesy than CIDALISE finds altogether agreeable, thinks he ought to make some acknowledgement of the proofs of affection that she gives him; but she resists his politeness so firmly that he is compelled to give up his projects. He is cross with her; she kisses him, rallies him on his attentions, and even ventures to assure him that her refusals are not disagreeable to his vanity. This irritates him, and he maintains that vanity does not play as great a part as she supposes in his desire to make acknowledgement of the gracious things that she has just said to him, and as she persists in disbelieving him, he feels called upon to show*

her that he is perfectly sincere. At last she agrees; but far from being any the more disposed to allow him to express his gratitude as he wished, she assures him that all she can do is to be sorry for him. He does not find this sort of pleasantry at all agreeable, and complains of her unkindness.]

CLITANDRE

I did not think, I must confess, that my sad state could be made the subject for jesting. If you will allow me to say so, this is quite unprecedented barbarity.

CIDALISE

Mischievous creature! To console Araminte for your neglect of her charms, and your hard-hearted account of the affair, I should almost like to tell her how this night you have shown yourself one of the most gallant knights on whom the gods have ever bestowed the pleasing gift of thanking a lady for her favour. I should think she would be much astonished, would she not?

CLITANDRE

No, for she would not believe you, and her vanity would make her extremely sceptical about the matter.

CIDALISE

Julie, for instance; had she no more cause for congratulation than Araminte?

CLITANDRE

So we are coming back to Julie: you mean to insist that she was my mistress? And yet I hardly think . . .

CIDALISE

You hardly think she was, I suppose?

CLITANDRE

Even if I was in some doubt on the matter, it would not be so misplaced as you might think; after all, the serious passages that took place between us occurred after dinner. Our relation was hardly what you suggest.

CIDALISE

How could a woman like Julie allow such a thing? Really, I could not have believed it.

CLITANDRE

You must not blame her—nothing could be more

unfair. She could not decently have kept me longer, and I am sure you will agree when I tell you how it all came about. You remember that the summer of last year was extremely hot. One stifling day I went to see her. I found her alone in a room with all the shutters closed, and the curtains drawn, which made it even darker still. She was lying on a sofa in a careless attitude, and was even more carelessly dressed; in fact her attire was merely a simple shift, of which the ribbons were half undone, and a tolerably short skirt. She had nothing on her head, and her hair, like the rest of her person, was in that sort of disorder which we find more attractive than any kind of adornment when, as in her case, it is supported by the most exquisite freshness and all the more enchanting qualities that youth and grace can bestow. You know how pretty she is. She had often attracted me, and I had told her so from time to time. That day I wanted more than ever to tell her so again. The attitude in which I had found her was charming, and I should advise every woman whose figure is good to take one like it when she wishes to make a really vivid impression. In particular her skirt revealed a good deal of limb: no doubt she was

quite aware of this, but as, with the exception of yourself, I do not know any woman more perfect in this respect, she did not think it necessary to alter her position on my arrival. At the very moment when I was going to tell her how touched I was by her charms, she began to talk about the awful heat of the last few days. You know that she had taken a course of lectures at Pagny's, and that she sometimes entertains to dinner a few eminent members of the Academy of Sciences: and you will not be surprised to hear that, in view of all this, she thinks she is well acquainted with physics. I had so often rallied her on her fancy for learning that she thought she ought to seize this opportunity for showing me she had acquired some. So she started a dissertation on the effects of heat and the sort of annihilation of the faculties which extreme heat can produce in us, and this, as far as I can remember, she claimed was caused by the excessive dissipation of the humours of the body and a relaxation of the nerves. I disputed this: she replied with warmth, and so much so, that she went so far as to maintain that on that very day if a man were to find himself in the company of the most charming of women, even if she

were the woman of his heart, he would find himself quite unmoved. I could at the moment have given the most vigorous denial of this opinion; but notwithstanding the advantage of my position, I contented myself with observing quietly that I was afraid she was wrong. The modest and gentle tone in which I spoke apparently convinced her that I had no good reason for not sharing her opinion, but that I had disputed it simply for the sake of doing so. This gave her fresh confidence, and she assured me with pride that she was quite sure of what she was saying, and that the first physicians in the world shared her views on the matter. I replied, still in the same mild tone, that it was not impossible for a man to be an excellent physician and still to be wrong on such a matter: perhaps these important personages on whose authority she was relying had decided the matter on their own personal evidence, but that I would venture to ask them to refer the matter to me.

CIDALISE

That would certainly have been a cruel blow to the science of physics!

CLITANDRE

I ought, incidentally, to thank you for that; but perhaps you would rather not.

CIDALISE

I think not: go on with your story.

CLITANDRE

Well, Julie became more and more persistent and, perhaps because she had had some private experience on the matter which she did not like to mention to me, but which was, none the less, the cause of her obstinacy, she finally said, with an air of assurance which, I admit, offended me, that if there existed a man who was not affected by the heat to this extent that she maintained, he must be a very remarkable phenomenon. You may imagine how I, who had been playing the part of this phenomenon for the last quarter of an hour and hardly thought myself a rarity, was astonished that she so valued a condition which seemed so natural to me. However, far from wishing to abuse my apparent advantages, I replied, still in the same humble manner, that I did not believe that any man whose personal experience

might justify his disagreeing with her would think much more of himself for that. Upon this, she said, with an air that made me quickly realize how little she supposed me in possession of such potent proofs against her thesis, that I was just like all ignorant persons who choose to dispute evidence, and even deny their own inmost convictions. I then pointed out that miracles might occur; but I observed her so determined not to admit the possibility of any miracle of this kind that I was obliged to convince her that doctors are not always right. She was astounded. I have never seen a philosopher so humiliated. Nevertheless, whether from pride or prejudice, her confusion soon gave way to reproaches. Without allowing myself to be perturbed, I took the liberty of pointing out to her that as she would not admit any of my reasons she had forced me to a demonstration that must silence her, and prove to her that however general a rule might be, one must always allow for exceptions. I added that, for the honour of the science of physics, or definitely to convince herself that she was in the wrong, she could not refuse to go through with the experiment; that up till now her thesis was only partially invali-

dated, and that it would be unworthy for her to admit defeat when she was merely confronted with probabilities that might not stand the test of proof. Her fear of having given way too soon; her desire to humiliate me as well; the extraordinary turn of the affair; the occasion; the proof already offered, which no amount of contradiction could discredit; and beyond everything, no doubt, a strong inclination to convince herself on the matter, overcame the empty scruples which still restrained her. An affectionate sigh; a blush of desire and anticipation, so different from the blushes of modesty alone; her eyes shining with the most lively ardour and belying the severity of her demeanour; everything showed me that she was very willing to be instructed, and a certain ironical air with it all that did not escape my notice suggested that it would not be difficult to overcome her prejudice. In order to be undisturbed during the important lesson which I was to give, I went and shut the door and came back with alacrity to prove to her the incorrectness of her opinion.

CIDALISE

And no doubt you convinced her?

CLITANDRE

Yes, but I had some trouble in doing so. However, obstinate as she was, she gave way at last. It is true that my arguments were a little brutal, but she was completely persuaded that I was right.

CIDALISE

I can well imagine that.

CLITANDRE

That is indeed kind of you.

CIDALISE

And without flattery; but perhaps you will not believe me.

CLITANDRE

That is what I want more than anything else in the world; but you may be making a mistake?

CIDALISE

It is easy to understand that Julie might be wrong in arriving at a conclusion about the effects of circumstances on others, but it is not possible for me to deceive myself about my own character. However

that may be, I want you to finish your story. Surely I have paid for it dearly enough, and to refuse to let me hear the end would be most unfair.

CLITANDRE

Although Julie's knowledge of physics may not be profound, she is none the less one of the most agreeable women in the world: I would have been extremely anxious that the course of lessons which we had begun should continue on another day, and I pressed her to make an appointment. She was more grateful for my explanations than resentful at my being in the right, and I should no doubt have persuaded her, except that her extreme attachment to Cléon and her fear that the learned enquiries which I desired to pursue in her company might be open to suspicion, made it necessary for her to refuse. I was sure that after what had passed I should find another favourable opportunity. So I did not press her unduly, and we parted on the best of terms. However, I looked in vain for the suitable occasions that I had thought would be so easy to find. Without in any way giving me any reason to protest, she merely avoided being alone with me, so long as she saw that

I had any sort of feeling for her. But last winter, in spite of all her precautions, I found her alone in the house of Lucile, who had not yet come in. The solitude in which we found ourselves awakened my affection, and the constrained manner with which she treated me, and which I misinterpreted, encouraged it. I asked her with a smile whether she had any doubts on the effects of cold. She blushed: I threw myself at her feet and said all the tender and pressing things that I could think of, but she seemed more embarrassed than moved. The rights that she had given me, which my conduct showed that I remembered very well, far from engaging her inclinations as I had hoped, seemed merely to distress her. After what had passed between us she could not venture to put on an air of severity that might well have seemed ridiculous and, distracted by the familiarity with which I was treating her, she burst into tears. The conduct that I have always most detested and, indeed, is the most unworthy of a gentleman, is to win a victory over a woman of a kind that will humiliate her. I was sure that I could succeed, but I was equally convinced that if I took unfair advantage of her reasons for giving way I should cause

her the most lively distress. I begged pardon for my behaviour and withdrew my claims. She was so touched by a generosity which, from my demeanour, she had not expected, that I think gratitude might have induced her to grant me more than I had tried to take, if at that moment Lucile had not come home. Good actions are never without reward, however, and that very evening I was indemnified by Luscinde for my self-denial over Julie.

CIDALISE

[*Eagerly.*] Ah, Clitandre, do tell me the story of Luscinde. I detest her more than any other woman, and I can hardly tell you the satisfaction it gives me when I think that she may have met with some adventure hardly worthy of the dignified sentiments on which she prides herself.

CLITANDRE

I am quite willing to gratify you; but I must warn you not to imagine that I can give you one of my best stories for nothing, especially as you are so extremely curious about it.

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CIDALISE

[*Tenderly.*] How cruel you are!

CLITANDRE

I agree that I am perhaps taking a little advantage of your eagerness to hear the story, and that this is possibly not entirely generous on my part; but I have made up my mind. You cannot have it for less than Julie's story cost you, and you may regard yourself as fortunate that there is no higher price.

CIDALISE

Very well, if you will come here again to-morrow night we will see.

CLITANDRE

Will I not? Can you doubt it? Certainly I will come to-morrow, since you are willing to receive me; but you know what a painful uneasiness will follow these raptures! Even my eyes will not dare to reveal what I shall suffer, or at any rate they ought not to do so. But can I be sure that my desires, aroused but not satisfied, will not betray me? I know too well that I

cannot answer for myself if I leave you in my present frenzied condition. Remember that we have to conceal our feelings from persons who are both extremely malicious and extremely alert: how do you suppose that I can conceal mine when I cannot look at you without feeling the most lively emotions? when your eyes can never turn to mine without piercing to my very soul; that I shall never see you open your mouth without wanting to close it with my lips; that when I look at you everything will continually remind me of the delights with which you have overwhelmed me and make me once more impatient for your embraces. You must help me to a more peaceful enjoyment of your presence, and you will not find me the less loving. However much you may yield to my desire, there will always remain enough to torment me.

CIDALISE

Very well; be satisfied. All my affection and all the passion that you inspire in me are yours. You have taught me that before I met you I have never been really loved, and I am even more glad to know that I have loved no one as I love you. You move—you

pierce—you overwhelm my very soul. Do you not know how much I love you? I no longer exist—I am engulfed in your love and in mine.

[We do not record CLITANDRE'S reply, animated as it no doubt was. We are well aware that not everything that lovers say is of general interest, and that often the conversations that most amuse them are the most difficult to reproduce, and indeed are not worth the trouble. We shall, therefore, here, and in certain other passages, omit their somewhat inconsequent utterances and only proceed to record the conversation when the reader can, without undue strain upon his understanding, grasp what they are saying.]

CIDALISE

[Observing CLITANDRE'S again somewhat intimidating expression.] Ah, Clitandre, are you not ashamed to frighten me again? I beg you not to look at me as you are doing, and if possible leave me in peaceful enjoyment of your feelings and my own.

CLITANDRE

But in what way have I made you uneasy?

CIDALISE

Have I not the right to be alarmed by this very fact that you think you are showing deep affection and winning all my love when you are perhaps merely frightening me?

CLITANDRE

It is most unfair of you to think that this was in my mind. I never intended any such thing. I merely give myself up to the impression made upon me by your charms without at all considering whether the manner in which I express it is the one that may be most agreeable to you. And, to tell the truth, I do not think that this should give you any cause for doubting my affection.

CIDALISE

I fancy that, at bottom, you have a very strange opinion of my sex, and I must confess I fear that one day I may become a victim of your views.

CLITANDRE

So far is it from being true that I think about all women in the same way, that I have been in no way surprised at not being congratulated by you on a

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quality which the excellent Araminte thought deserving of the highest praise.

CIDALISE

I should indeed be surprised if our tastes in such matters were in agreement.

CLITANDRE

I should also add that, apart from your totally different attitudes of mind, your inclinations are quite diverse.

CIDALISE

I should be extremely humiliated if, without gross unfairness, you found it possible to make the slightest comparison between us.

CLITANDRE

You are indeed much given to imaginary terrors, but I hardly think I shall need to cure you of this one.

CIDALISE

She is really an odious woman, and I hope, for the honour of my sex, that there are not many like her.

CLITANDRE

I fancy her type is more common than you think, but less so than we pretend.

CIDALISE

But do not forget that you owe me the story of Luscinde.

CLITANDRE

No, all things considered, you would not like it, and I was misleading you when I said that it would amuse you. It was such a straightforward ordinary affair that it is hardly worth the telling. You must know that it was a mere adventure in a carriage, an event that happens every day; a feeble affair.

CIDALISE

Never mind, I want to hear about it.

CLITANDRE

You must admit that your object is much more to divert my attention than to listen to an entertaining story.

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CIDALISE

That may be so, but you must tell it all the same.

CLITANDRE

Oronte, who had quarrelled for some unknown reason with Luscinde at dinner the same evening on which I had met Julie at Lucile's house, went away without taking leave of her. As she had relied on his taking her home and had, consequently, sent away her carriage, she was not unnaturally excessively annoyed, and suggested that I should escort her back. We had known each other for some time, and for a while she had even seemed to betray certain intentions in my direction. As soon as we were alone we joined in abusing Oronte. She seemed so humiliated by what had passed that I thought that, being, as in fact I was, a sincere friend of hers, I could not refrain from encouraging her to take her revenge or from offering my services for that purpose, should she decide upon it: and I represented this as the only course she could possibly take after the abominable affront that had been put upon her. I had no difficulty in convincing her that she must revenge herself, but in spite of her extreme anger

I was not at first able to persuade her, as easily as I had thought, to revenge herself then and there: and time was pressing. I realized that if I allowed her time to think I should lose her, or, even supposing that she would not forgive Oronte for a piece of ill-manners which was probably the result of jealousy, or perhaps something even more trivial, yet to incline her to me it would be necessary to show her attentions that would mean more trouble than I cared to take. I recollected that one day when we were talking about what are called 'familiarities', she expressed herself as not averse from them within certain limits, and that she even said, in a jesting way, that she found them less offensive than indifference. But however I might hope that familiarity from me might annoy her less than such conduct from another, this appeared a somewhat drastic measure, and anxious as I was that she should make up her mind quickly, I thought I ought to remonstrate with her on the wrong she was doing to herself in not taking her revenge. Whether my feelings lent me more than my accustomed eloquence, or whether, as too often happens to women, reflection only increased her anger, at any rate I found her much

more inclined to believe me than she had been at first. As soon as I began to realize that she was shaken, I tried to decide her in my favour by a rather warmer persuasiveness than I had hitherto used, and I begged her not to refuse me permission to make amends to her for even the slightest of the wrongs that she had received from Oronte. As she did not answer, I thought I could interpret her silence in my favour, and I acted accordingly. I displayed very little feeling but a great deal of ardour, which may be, and often is, a very good substitute for feeling, and goes much further. She first told me I was an impertinent fellow—and this I well knew: that she should scream—but she didn't; and even if she so forgot herself, my coachman would not have stopped unless I had myself called to him. But as I positively had to say something to Luscinde, I agreed that she might indeed find me a little free in my behaviour, but that love and desire—the age-long excuses for all the impertinences that have been, are, and ever will be committed—must be allowed to justify me: and now that these passions had carried me so far, and that the more guilty I became the more reasons I found for congratulating

myself on my misdeeds, I would pursue them to the end. I don't know whether it is that a firm tone nearly always imposes on your sex, or whether at the same time as I was finding, as I had said to her, reasons for congratulating myself on my misdeeds, she was finding reasons for excusing them: at any rate, she relented so far as to tell me quite plainly that the whole thing was ridiculous. Even if I had not realized from this rather feeble remark how much her anger against me had diminished, I had made up my mind, and my conduct would in no way have improved. She hardly thought so, I fancy; but whatever she did think, one thing is quite certain, that before she reached home she had taken her revenge.

CIDALISE

But there is only one street from Julie's house to hers.

CLITANDRE

That is quite true, but it is a long one, and I have a coachman who is so marvellously accustomed to the ways of Society that whenever I take a woman home at night he assumes that I have very interesting

things to say to her, and he adopts the speed which he thinks I should order if I made him aware of my intentions. As a result of his considerateness the journey became unnecessarily long. Besides, her anger and my ardour were such that they had to decide the matter even if the road had been much shorter. Still, whether because she called to mind the remarkable promptitude with which she had revenged herself, or whether she was afraid that Oronte, who is by nature suspicious, might learn that after having taken her home I had gone into her house, we had scarcely reached her door when she assumed her stately air once more and told me that the affair was scandalous; that she would never go in a carriage with me again; that she would never have thought me capable of such insolence to a woman of her kind. I at once agreed that I had been too impatient; that I could hardly understand how I could have ventured to have failed her on this point; that I was covered with shame, all the more because such conduct was no more characteristic of me than of her, and that I dared swear that she was the first with whom I had so far forgotten myself. I was rather doubtful whether a defence of this kind, so politely

turned, would be to her liking, and I was hardly surprised when, with considerable asperity, she thanked me for the preference that I had shown in her favour. Again I pleaded my love and my affection. While she was attacking me in this way, and saying, among other cutting remarks, that I apparently took her for a chorus girl, my carriage turned into the courtyard of her house, and I was preparing to escort her respectfully to her door when she told me sharply that she did not wish me to get out. I first pointed out gently that we should both look extremely ridiculous if I did not hand her out of the carriage; that her people and mine would not know what to think; that she could not even display anger towards me without the risk of betraying what had happened; that I was too sincerely attached to her to allow her to behave herself in a way which might have such unpleasant consequences; and, moreover, that I could not leave her without having asked a thousand pardons at her knees and without having tried to obtain her forgiveness by my respectful demeanour. Her only reply was an impatient attempt to get out of the carriage. I held her back, and, with a pretence of extreme anger, I told her I

would not allow her to disgrace herself. Whether her attitude was simply assumed in order to recover my esteem a little, or whether, as I find it more difficult to believe, she was truly angry, it was a long time before I could calm her. At last, when she was tired of feigning anger, or of displaying it, she told me that she saw quite well what my intention was: that it was much more my desire to offer her another affront that made me wish to get out with her, than to protect her reputation; but she would know how to defeat my insolent scheming, and that she would only speak to me in the presence of her women. 'Well, Madame,' I answered, in a firm tone, 'I shall have the pleasure, then, of having them as witnesses of all the raptures that you inspire in me.' Although this brief reply and the firmness of my tone made an impression on her, she tried, but in vain, to shake off the fear that she felt of me, and replied bravely, 'We shall see.' 'Very well, Madame,' I replied, with an assumption of violence, 'you will see.' At this point we got out of the carriage: I addressed her as *Marquise* with all the familiarity in the world, and in order to leave no doubt as to my intentions, I squeezed as hard as I could the hand that I held.

‘Go on if it amuses you,’ she said in a low tone, ‘but you will go all the same, I can assure you.’ ‘On my faith,’ I replied, ‘I do not advise you to suggest my departure if you do not wish to expose yourself to a scene that you might find rather disagreeable.’ In reality, as I have told you, she was afraid of me, and her apprehension lest I should make a disturbance decided her, but with every possible sign of ill-humour, to let me accompany her into the small room overlooking the garden, that you know of. At first she began to walk up and down in an infuriated way. I was sure that this performance would soon tire her, so I said nothing, and remained standing with lowered eyes, in gloomy silence, until she should see fit to sit down. Finally she flung herself into a large armchair, her head in one of her hands in the appropriate attitude for dismal dreams. The instant I observed this I rushed to throw myself at her knees. She pushed me back at first with not a little violence, but at last I seized the unkind hand that rejected me and covered it with kisses. She made certain efforts to withdraw it, but, exaggerated as they were, I could easily feel their real weakness. I then ventured to take her in my

arms, rather with the affectionate tenderness of love than the sharp impatience of desire. Although I did not think I should have to bring her back from very far, and her anger would have alarmed me very little, after the want of respect she had complained about, which, to tell the truth, had been rather extreme, I could not appear to believe her less angry than she pretended to be without arousing in her more violent feelings than she might wish to show. I did not love her, but I liked her, and although she had not resisted my insolence in a manner which made me think that she regarded it as violence, her attitude had hardly displayed the kindness and grace inseparable from consent. Also I was not yet altogether familiar with her, and I wanted my victory to be complete. Another man would perhaps have tried to excuse his misdeeds merely by putting half the blame on her, but although I knew perfectly well that a great deal of my bad behaviour was her fault, I generously ascribed all the guilt to my own insolence. While making every protestation of respect I drew aside, but with a not too confident hand, a cloak that did indeed conceal from me some of her loveliness. I don't know whether the polite manner

in which I went about the matter, which did indeed display the utmost consideration, made her unwilling to resist, or whether in her angry state she did not observe what I was doing, but the result was that the cloak was no longer in my way. Her charms deserved, indeed, all the praises I could think of, but I thought that a display of emotion would express better than praises the impression I had received, and I did not spare it. I have no doubt that she found it difficult to reconcile my transports with the profound respect for her about which I had talked so much, and she must have seen how very contradictory my behaviour was; but she appeared to think that I felt the inconsistency as much as she did, and that it was useless to say anything; or perhaps my display of rapture, combined as it was from time to time with a demonstration of all the gallantries of which I knew the secret, flattered her pride and possibly stirred her senses, so that she had neither the strength to deter me nor to make me feel my disgracefully inconsequent behaviour. While she appeared still to be resisting me, she began to yield to my embrace. All my entreaties, however, had not been able to win from her a single glance, and

although I did not need to look into her eyes to read her dispositions and gain courage to profit by them, I wanted, as I have told you, my conquest to be complete, and I urged her to condescend to honour with one look an unfortunate being who adored her. At last she relented, and as I had expected, I discovered in her eyes agitation rather than anger. This moment of kindness lasted but a flash: I urged her to turn her eyes to me once more, and not in vain. 'Leave me, Sir,' she said, in a tone of some affection, 'and if that be possible, do not increase my hatred of you.' Notwithstanding the gentleness of her tone, I could not endure without protest to be told that I was hated, and I took the liberty of asking her if this was the manner in which she pardoned her offenders. Her only answer was a smile, more affectionate, perhaps, than she thought, and perhaps you will easily guess how I impressed my gratitude upon her lips. She was so little expecting a familiarity of this kind that she had no time to compose herself so as to prevent me from obtaining more than an appearance of the favour that I ravished from her, and indeed it was as delicious as if she had bestowed it upon me with all the good will in the world. These new

delights—for as you may imagine, much had been neglected while we were in the carriage—were not won without opposition. If from time to time I was able to congratulate myself on her indulgence, more often her demeanour made me feel that she thought my importunity merely violence; and although I realized that her desires were more genuine than her anger, I was distressed by her constant change of mind. Yet how could I tell her so without restoring to her a freedom which she might have used to my disadvantage? It would have meant more recriminations, more attempts at self-defence, and I should have wasted in this very troublesome manner time which could have been better employed. All things considered, I thought the best means of getting over her obstinacy was to assume a similar attitude myself, and I was very soon convinced that I had taken the right course. As soon as I had brought her to the desired state of mind, I finally abandoned the appearance of respect which I had in some measure until then preserved, and I tried to discover how far her indulgence would reach. It did not at first extend as far as I had thought, and I had still a certain diffidence to overcome. I began to think her

resistance more irritating than agreeable, and as I felt certain that I had carried my consideration much further than the situation required, with a polite sigh, I determined upon the only stroke of authority which could terminate the discussion, and—with entire success. It is true that, to begin with, Luscinde made me feel that she was still offended: but in the end she became what she really was rather than what she wished to seem, and I observed her forget that she loved Oronte and did not love me, and discover in the act of vengeance all the attraction that it is said to possess.

CIDALISE

Faithless one! You told me the story would not amuse me. I find it delightful.

CLITANDRE

Yes, as a matter of fact it is not too bad. But I fancy Luscinde found it deplorable, and that is how one cannot please everybody, and now you must prove that you owe me something for it.

CIDALISE

No.

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A NIGHT

CLITANDRE

No?

CIDALISE

Besides, the story is not finished, and I have not forgotten that I paid you in advance: and perhaps you owe me something.

CLITANDRE

But perhaps I will not finish it.

CIDALISE

I fancy I should not lose much, and that you have told me the most interesting part.

CLITANDRE

You are entirely wrong; but, however that may be, you will not get the rest except at the price you paid for the beginning.

CIDALISE

You must not talk like that: you really frighten me. [*He teases her.*] No, my friend, you will not catch me again. [*She takes all possible precautions against him.*]

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A NIGHT

CLITANDRE

That is a delightful way to behave!

CIDALISE

I am sorry it does not please you, because I shall so continue for the rest of the night. Instead of annoying me as you are doing, and making your absurd proposals, why don't you finish the story?

CLITANDRE

Very well, then, since I must. Perhaps you think I am showing too much kindness because I find it more convenient than hardening my heart against you. But I am quite sincere. . . .

CIDALISE

Oh, as to that, I have no doubt of you at all.

CLITANDRE

But I am anxious that you should not believe . . .

CIDALISE

Do not be afraid that I shall believe anything to your disadvantage. . . . Come, Sir, you need not be at the

pains of proving it. Very well, you may regard me as convinced; shall I now hear the rest of the story?

CLITANDRE

As the blame for what had passed was pretty equally shared between Luscinde and me, and she could hardly tell me again, with any appearance of justice, that I had insulted her, as soon as she had recovered from the errors into which, at my instance, she had fallen, she lowered her eyes with all the signs of the greatest confusion. I realized that, at first, no display of rapture would avail to rescue her from so disagreeable a condition, and I thought the best I could do to mitigate her self-reproach was to represent the wrongs that Oronte had put upon her, and, while pointing out as forcibly as I could how monstrously he had failed her, I added that a man might be forgiven for making a scene in private, but that when he so far forgot himself as to make one in public and to show an utter disregard of appearances, it was impossible to pass over outbursts so scandalous, and I ventured to add that, since I had been in Society I had never seen so disgraceful an exhibition of bad taste as had taken place that evening, and she was the

only woman who would have kept for so long a lover who could only express his affection by the most outrageous jealousy and the most violent behaviour. These remarks produced the desired effect: she flared up, convinced that I was right, and attacked him with all the vigour of which you know she is capable, and merely expressed surprise at having waited so long to avenge herself on so inconvenient and disrespectful an admirer. As soon as she began to exonerate herself, I naturally began to appear tolerably innocent. The enthusiasm for her interests that she saw me to possess; certain comparisons that she must have made between Oronte and myself, and which at that juncture turned to my advantage; a sort of regard for me that had perhaps suddenly taken her, all these made her at last adopt the tender and familiar tone for which I had until then looked in vain. I responded to her in a manner likely to give her the most encouragement, and although my part in the conversation had hardly been distinguished by sincerity of feeling, she considered that I had more delicacy than any of my contemporaries, and expressed surprise that I had not noticed it before.

Conduct which had appeared, and indeed with some reason, the most scandalous insolence, began to look like an attack of temerity against which the most respectful lover cannot always guard himself: one of those unfortunate moments when a man is carried away in spite of himself, which a woman must always forgive, because it is love and not desire that has overcome him. Although these remarks assured me that I was forgiven, I wanted her to grant me all that the impetuosity of my passion had forced me to go without, and I wished to follow all the stages that our affair would have gone through if we had had time to develop it in the usual way. So I assured her as earnestly as possible that I adored her. Very soon the most tender avowals rewarded my declaration, and were followed by all those gentle favours that could add their confirmation. These led to others; and her resistance was only such as was calculated to add to our pleasures. It is true that love had little to do in all this, but it was some time before we noticed this deficiency. Although she has a thousand charming traits, and very few women unite so many, and although a lover, or what comes as near it as may be, would find in her a thousand graces, each

more delightful than the last, by I know not what caprice of taste she seemed more suited to amuse a man for a while than to hold his settled affections. Perhaps we pay little attention to this, but, however far what are called morals and principles are discredited, we still look for them. I had therefore no desire to continue the relation, at least, unless (for when I do not love I have no pride at all) she had so arranged that Oronte or even some one else should relieve me of the embarrassment of an unwelcome impersonation, and permit of my remaining among the crowd. Although I did not despair of inducing her to agree to an accommodation, she spoke to me so affectionately and made in all earnestness such important plans for the future, that I didn't know how I could make a proposal to her which displayed such a deficiency of feeling and even of respect. It was not that I found it difficult to promise even more than she demanded. I felt that it would be unseemly to make her break with a man who was at least very necessary to her vanity, when I was unwilling to replace him. I was not, however, in any hurry to disabuse her of a mistake which, while it excused her ardour, enabled her to yield to mine without

fears and even without scruples. However animated our conversation had been, I was quite certain that she could not keep it at the level at which it had started, and I thought it better to wait until she had begun to grow weary before making my intentions clear. As soon as this moment arrived—a moment which, notwithstanding my pleasant situation, I awaited with impatience, I began to talk about the despair which Oronte would feel at losing, and by his fault alone, the only woman who could make a man perfectly happy. She asked if I thought that he was possessed of so much feeling, and I replied that I was quite sure that his grief would be intolerable. ‘It would be merely from vanity,’ she replied; ‘for from his conduct he can hardly be capable of any other sentiment.’ ‘But,’ said I, ‘you must surely agree that he is deeply in love with you!’ On this point I made clear to her as delicately as I could, but at the same time with a good deal of warmth and detail, everything that Oronte had done to prove that he was most deeply in love with her, and, while admitting that he had done her some wrong, I pointed out that he had never been guilty of any conduct which might indicate indifference; but

during the four years he had loved her she could only reproach him with these outbursts of jealousy, cruel indeed, and extremely unpleasant, and for which she quite rightly wished him to pay the penalty; but it was only because they were so violent and so persistent that they could be regarded as in any sense a crime, since every lover is more or less guilty in this respect. As soon as I began to speak of Oronte I noticed that she frowned and assumed a forbidding expression, as if she meant to imply that I had better not talk about so unpleasant a subject; but as soon as I began to enlarge upon his love for her and on all that he had done to prove how dear she was to him, she began gradually, and in spite of herself, to show signs of interest: she became lost in meditation, then fell to sighing, and at last could not restrain her tears at the picture which I drew—though I adjured her to forget him—of his devotion and of his amiability, and she could not understand how she could ever for one moment have done him the injustice of doubting his adoration.

CIDALISE

Really, your conduct is quite outrageous!

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A NIGHT

CLITANDRE

What would you have had me do? I could hardly have taken her over from him!

CIDALISE

No, but you should never have taken her at all.

CLITANDRE

No doubt that would have been better; but apart from the fact that she was quite charming enough to attract me, I wanted to revenge myself on Oronte, who, while I was with Aspasia, had so far forgotten himself as to do his best to supplant me. I had promised myself that I would not miss an opportunity of recording my gratitude, and I thought there was hardly a better means of doing so than by returning his mistress to him after I had done with her.

CIDALISE

Nothing could have been fairer or better advised.

CLITANDRE

I quite agree: it was indeed the only course I could take. But my observations embarrassed Luscinde all

the more because I spoke with warmth about my own feelings while exaggerating the attractions and the affection of Oronte. I noticed with secret delight that it would not take much to make her fall into a mad affection for him and a well justified detestation of me. No sooner did I observe this than I thought it well once more to permit myself familiarities that, since our last understanding, had become a matter of course, but which, in view of the fresh turn her heart had now taken, she would certainly consider an offence. However dexterously she tried to conceal her agitation, her remorse, her renewed affections, and the reluctance with which she again yielded to transports which only a few moments before had so utterly absorbed her, she inspired in me too little love, and I am too familiar with that sort of thing to have made it possible for her to deceive me in her demeanour. She ceased to reply to my caresses and my adjurations, except with that false smile, that cold and forced complaisance, which women use towards a lover who has ceased to please, but whom they have not yet ventured to enlighten. Without a word to say, with lowered gaze, she was really resisting the advances to which she seemed to

yield, and whose attractions she had so recently and so completely forgotten. No, I have never seen ill-humour and disgust displayed with so little concealment and so much simplicity. A moment of pride made me regret my attentions, and I was on the point of being unfair enough to reproach her pretty warmly for having made me suffer the humiliations which I had myself sought. Fortunately for her and for me, this access of imbecility did not last long, and far from deceiving myself as to the nature of the disturbance in my senses which had been thus aroused, I was able to master it and to see myself as I really was. I could not get out of my embarrassment except by means of reproaches, but I made them as reasonable and as restrained as I could, and I took the greatest care that they should not be unduly humiliating to her. And I was right, because I was certainly more in the wrong than she was. Her resentment against Oronte would have gone no further than complaints to me against his conduct, or, at the most, the simplest plans for revenge if I had not taken advantage of the distracted condition in which she was, and taken by force the favours which she would herself perhaps never have thought of

granting me. It was therefore without the slightest feeling of bitterness that I complained that she had mistaken her heart, when she thought that I could make her forget Oronte. Her only answer was a look and a sigh which made clear to me how deeply indeed she reproached herself with having done so. I then said all the polite and flattering things that one could think of to a woman who is giving up a lover, and I said that I was the less surprised at our mutual ill-luck because at the very moment of all her kindness she had made me feel how greatly she was attached to the man whom she thought to sacrifice for me. I added that, even if it were possible, I should find it more cruel to try to hold her against my will than it would have been delightful to possess her heart; that however painful it might be to me, I ought to cease to believe in any rights of mine from the moment she refused to admit them, and I would rather she bestowed on me the somewhat arid name of friend than that I should retain the title of lover when it might mean the ruin of her life.

How strange some women are! It is certain that after what had passed between us, and in the posi-

tion in which she then was, she could not have met with more agreeable treatment than the kindness with which I permitted her to cease to love me. I should naturally have awaited her acknowledgements; but she felt more deeply the slight to her charms which my easy retirement seemed to imply, than the consideration I was paying to her feelings; and although she was able to restrain herself from complaining of it, yet she could not conceal the disturbance to her pride. For a time I could not decide whether I should appear to have noticed it or whether I should continue in the course I had chosen; but when I reflected that all I could say on the point would only prolong the scene, and that whether she thought me in love or indifferent, she would in any case return to her first attachment, I decided on the second alternative. After a few further doubts and hesitations, my role of avenger changed to that of confidant. This was a character hardly as flattering to my vanity as the first one, but as it suited my plans better, it was without the slightest regret that I saw Luscinde pass, as I watched her, from all the ecstasies of love to the most cruel coldness. What a change was there!

‘Oh, cruel Love, these, these are blows indeed!’

At last Luscinde carried her indifference so far, and conceived at the same time so extreme a confidence in my friendship, that she felt no hesitation in asking my advice as to what she ought to do. I answered her with equal self-possession that, from the moment I was willing to sacrifice myself the affair was perfectly straightforward; that I flattered myself that she did me justice enough not to doubt my discretion; but as it was possible that Oronte, who is truly most desperately jealous, might discover that I had passed the night there, and that he would torture himself over the matter if he thought it had been concealed from him, I said I would go that very morning and remonstrate with him on his violent behaviour and tell him that I had spent in vain the greater part of the night in persuading her to forgive him. She expressed approval of the arrangement proposed, and promised me her friendship for ever.

CIDALISE

The affair does you both great credit and could hardly have been concluded in a more high-minded manner.

CLITANDRE

Concluded? But it is not yet over.

CIDALISE

What! Did she change her mind again? Really, this is too good to be true!

CLITANDRE

Oh, no! The rest of the story is far more striking, but, however deserving of admiration it may be, I must not make you wait for it too long.

At the moment I was leaving Luscinde, after we had descended to the mildest assurances of mutual regard, I felt disposed again to recommend myself to her favour, notwithstanding her ardent affection for Oronte. The notion struck me as so interesting, and the experiment so little likely to succeed, since I did not wish to use either threats or violence, that I felt I must move with extreme delicacy. So I pretended to look at her with more ardour than ever. I sighed deeply, and raised my eyes to heaven in a sadness that should have drawn tears. As if carried away by the force of my agitation, I flung myself at her knees and indeed spared nothing that could show her how

overwhelmed I was by the sacrifice that she was compelling me to make, and I did not hesitate to add that it was quite probable that I should not survive it. Although it is possible that these formidable protestations might not have moved her, her pride had been so stirred by the ease and expedition with which I had detached myself from the affair, that she could not but be greatly touched by my return. She begged me in all seriousness to continue to live. I adjured her in my turn, if my continued existence were a matter of so much concern to her, to receive me once more into her arms. This proposal appeared to astonish her, but her look seemed to imply that she did not find it so utterly absurd, and even that it was not entirely distasteful. Perhaps, too, the necessity of keeping in with me and her fear that I might revenge myself for a refusal by some unseemly indiscretion, were a not inconsiderable element in her unperturbed reception of my suggestion. However that may be, she replied with all the kindness that I could expect from a sincere friend that my regrets would only be the more painful, and that if I was wise I should try and extinguish the fires of my love, and not rekindle them. I admitted the truth

of her argument, but I insisted none the less, and caprice, fear and vanity took in her heart the place of affection. 'At least, Clitandre,' she said, as she prepared to yield, 'remember that this is your wish and not mine; and if my complaisance produces the effect that I fear, do not be so unfair as to make me responsible.' Thinking, therefore, that she had warned me enough, she gave way with tolerably good grace. I admit that it was abominable behaviour on my part, but I am afraid you may think it worse than it was. After all, it was only an experiment, and there is no law against experiments.

CIDALISE

Far from it, they can only be useful, and they are much in favour at present.

CLITANDRE

As you have judged from my account of the matter, there was not merely no love, but only the feeblest attraction in my last application to her. You will therefore readily understand that I was not greatly moved. Her own feelings were hardly more favourably disposed than mine: we both began the

interview without being sufficiently intent upon the matter of our conversation to prevent our touching on other matters, and we both remained for some time in this condition of indifference.

Finally I thought that she had ceased to display quite the same disinterestedness. It was not that she loved me more than she had undertaken to do; but apparently she began to be interested. I felt a desire to discover if it were true, as many people say, that instinct is stronger than sentiment; and, to clear up this point, at the moment Luscinde appeared to have forgotten the world and to exist only for me: 'Ah, Madame,' I cried, 'why is it that in such exquisite moments I cannot forget my rival? Or why, at least, can I not make you forget him? For I see too clearly that the fortunate Oronte has undisputed possession of your heart. You are in despair at my embraces, and all you long for is the happiness you will again find in his arms: it would be quite useless for me to flatter myself that I can dismiss him for one instant from your heart.' 'Clitandre,' she replied bravely, 'you are right. I adore him.'

And what is remarkable, at the very moment she

was making this confession of affection for Oronte, she was overwhelming me with the most ardent caresses and giving me the strongest proofs of her emotions that I could possibly look for.

CIDALISE

And what did you conclude from this creditable experiment? . . .

CLITANDRE

That women are more truthful than we think when they say that no delights will make a woman, who has any delicacy of mind, forget the object of her heart, and that though it may not be he that provides them for her, it is none the less to him that she wishes to owe them. How true that is! But to be convinced of it I really had to make the experiment.

CIDALISE

Rascal!

CLITANDRE

And why? What can one do better than try to cure oneself of prejudices, and especially those that may deprive others of enjoyment? Well, to conclude the story of Luscinde, I carried out exactly what I had

undertaken. You are the only person to whom I have told this story. I compelled Oronte to admit his guilt and I sent him off to the feet of Luscinde to ask pardon for his bad behaviour. I even interceded for him, and I had the joy of seeing a clause inserted in the treaty that they drew up between them that it was at my instance only that peace was granted him. This adventure gave me real pleasure: and I have never thought of it afterwards without laughing.

CIDALISE

You make me shudder! The caprice and the bad faith which you seem to display in your relations with women make me really frightened, and I do most deeply regret any weakness I may have shown.

CLITANDRE

I will never tell you another story, since the only use you are able to make of them is to torment yourself. I will suppress your fears by restraining my confidence. However, I can swear to you, and with absolute truth, that I am naturally faithful, and that you will be, I venture to say, astonished at the strictness of my conduct.

CIDALISE

Alas! Heaven grant it may be so! [*The clock strikes.*]
Seven o'clock already!

CLITANDRE

I do not usually get up before ten o'clock, and I hardly think I shall learn earlier hours from you. You must surely realize that I cannot leave you until I have thoroughly reassured you.

CIDALISE

[*Getting up.*] I promise you that I will call Justine rather than let you torment me again.

CLITANDRE

That would indeed be charming of you! Please come back!

CIDALISE

But you promised to make my bed?

CLITANDRE

Certainly, and I may say, and without boasting unduly, that Justine, excellent as she is, cannot make a bed better than I can. [*They make the bed.*]

CIDALISE

So much the better. I never felt so much like sleep.

CLITANDRE

You mean that I cannot wait upon you until a little later.

CIDALISE

Much later, in fact; and what is more, I forbid you to tell any of the women who are here, especially Luscinde, that I am not yet up.

CLITANDRE

I don't see why you should be more afraid of her than of any other; but I am convinced of this, that I am less dangerous to her than anyone, and that since our adventure she has thought of me just as Julie has done, although I have more than once tried to induce her to live with me on the terms of freedom which would have suited the feelings she inspired in me and the very exiguous love that I had for her.

CIDALISE

I wonder, indeed, that she did not lend herself to such very reasonable proposals.

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A NIGHT

CLITANDRE

Yes, it is perhaps more singular than you think. Well, what do you think of your bed?

CIDALISE

It has never been better made. I am amazed at your talent in this direction.

CLITANDRE

Perhaps you think it unimportant, but I can assure you that, at a certain period of one's life, few gifts are more essential.

CIDALISE

You need not boast of it! I do not think any the better of you.

CLITANDRE

That sounds ungrateful, and I am not sure whether, to punish you, I should not be allowed to spoil an achievement which you appreciate so slightly.

CIDALISE

That would indeed be disgusting, seeing that I could

have been so comfortably accommodated without the slightest obligation to you.

CLITANDRE

That is an insult!

CIDALISE

Very well, I will go further. I am not afraid of you.

CLITANDRE

In saying that you show, if you will allow me to say so, more courage than prudence; but perhaps you defy me in order to enjoy the pleasures of defeat?

CIDALISE

Not entirely; but would my feeling of security be quite misplaced?

CLITANDRE

I thought I had been able to remove any doubts of that kind.

CIDALISE

As a matter of fact, to speak seriously, I have none.

CLITANDRE

I do not quite understand. Are you insulting me or

not? But I will not allow myself to be tortured by such doubts. [*He takes his revenge.*]

CIDALISE

Ah, Clitandre, I beg your pardon.

CLITANDRE

It was indeed time.

CIDALISE

Really, really! . . . And the best made bed in the world. . . . You are really intolerable!

CLITANDRE

Do you think so?

[*The reader must not think that, from what CIDALISE is saying to him, she is seriously finding fault with him. She is perhaps a little out of humour—and who would not be in her place? But none the less, she finally recovers her temper completely.*]

CIDALISE

I suppose you will go now?

THE OPPORTUNITIES OF A NIGHT

CLITANDRE

If you really wish it, I must; but I cannot refrain from telling you that in similar circumstances I have never been sent away so early. [*He opens the door.*]

CIDALISE

Very likely, but please go now; and, Clitandre, do go as quietly as you can.

CLITANDRE

Another talent of mine is that I can open a door more noiselessly than anyone and walk without making a sound.

CIDALISE

Alas! you have too many talents, and if it depended on me, I would give up those which you very likely value the most in return for the certainty that you would be faithful to me.

CLITANDRE

An excellent exchange for you, no doubt, my dear lady. I will give it you for less than that. [*He kisses her hand tenderly.*] Goodbye. I hope, if that be possible, that you may love me as much as you yourself are loved. [*Her reply is but a proof of her affection, and they part.*]

* END *



